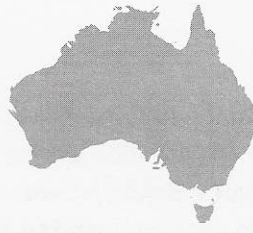


Australia

Commonwealth of Australia



Cultural Note

Australians do not appreciate people who go on about their education, qualifications, or achievements. Modesty is considered a virtue, and braggarts are considered fair game for ridicule or criticism. “Cutting down the tall poppy” is a common Australian aphorism for this behavior. The habit may have grown out of the nation’s origin as a British penal colony and the Australian prisoners’ hatred for their high-class British overseers. The feeling is still so ingrained that Australian politicians sometimes decline an offer of a British knighthood for fear of alienating their constituents.



WHAT’S YOUR CULTURAL IQ?

1. Aborigines believe they have lived in Australia since the beginning of time—and there is evidence that some people have existed there for over 100,000 years. When Captain Cook arrived in 1770, approximately how many Aborigines were on the continent?
 - a. 30,000
 - b. 300,000
 - c. 3,000,000

ANSWER: b. The precise numbers are debatable, but the Aborigine population declined quickly because of disease, sterilization, murder, and marginalization.

2. Australia covers a vast area and spans three time zones. Frequent travelers from the Americas know they will cross the International Date Line to get to and from Australia. In which direction do they gain a day?
 - a. Flying westward (from the Americas to Australia)
 - b. Flying eastward (from Australia to the Americas)

ANSWER: b. If you fly east, you “earn” a day. If you fly west, you “lose” one.

3. TRUE or FALSE: Gallipoli was a famous battle in WWII in Australia that cost Australians (and New Zealanders) heavy casualties.

ANSWER: FALSE. The Gallipoli campaign was in WWI (in 1915), and in Turkey. Their brave efforts generated a strong sense of identity for Australians.



TIPS ON DOING BUSINESS IN AUSTRALIA

- Less is more among the Australian business community. Australians tend to be laconic; brevity is admirable. Keep your business presentation short and to the point; do not

digress or go into too much detail. A verbose saleswoman can easily talk herself out of a sale.

- High-pressure sales and hype are counterproductive down under. Australians prefer honesty and directness and tend to fiercely resist pressure tactics. Present your case in a forthright manner, articulating both the good and the bad. Also, price your initial offer realistically, as the final price agreed upon will probably be close.
- Good health and participation in sports are top priorities for Australians. They draw a sharp line between work and play and definitely value their play. Do some research on the local sports, top players, and upcoming matches before you meet your Australian contacts. There is no safer topic of conversation with Australians than their wide variety of sports.



COUNTRY BACKGROUND

History

The original inhabitants of the continent, the Aborigines, were hunters and gatherers who arrived at least 38,000 years ago. Many of them tried to retain their traditional culture and live separately from the rest of the population. In recent decades, efforts have been made by the Australian government to be more responsive to aboriginal rights.

In 1770, Captain Cook took formal control of Australia for Britain. Soon after, Australian penal colonies were established; thus, the first settlers in the country were convicts and soldiers. Free settlers arrived later when word spread of the opportunities available “down under.” The numbers greatly increased when gold was discovered in 1851.

Australia became a member of the British Commonwealth in 1901. In 1942, the Statute of Westminster Adoption Act was passed, which officially gave Australia complete autonomy in both internal and external affairs. British authority was finally removed in 1986 when Queen Elizabeth severed the Australian Constitution from Great Britain’s.

In 1992, the “Mabo” decision by the Australian High Court determined that Australia had not been an empty land (*terra nullius*) before the British invasion, which led to another act allowing Aborigines and other distinct people to lay claim to government-owned land.

Subsequently, some of these new rights were curtailed by Prime Minister John Howard. In 2000, Australia hosted a safe and successful Olympics in Sydney.

Cultural Note

Before World War II, most Australians were from Britain or Ireland. With open immigration opportunities, this changed. Australia has now become one of the world’s ethnic melting pots, and many of its residents were born outside of its borders.

Type of Government

The Commonwealth of Australia is a democratic federal state system that recognizes the British monarch as the chief of state (represented nationally by a governor-general and in each state by a governor). However, Australia is an independent nation and does not consider itself a constitutional monarchy.

The legislative branch of the government is a federal parliament, composed of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The prime minister heads the executive branch and is the head of the government. An independent high court heads the judicial branch. There are three major political parties: Labor, Liberal, and Australian Democrat.

Australia is known for offering extensive social welfare programs to its citizens. It is active in the United Nations and is particularly involved in assisting its developing neighbors in Asia and the Pacific. Over fifty countries receive aid from Australia.

For current government data, visit the Embassy of Australia www.austemb.org.

Cultural Note

If you drive in the outback, be sure to bring plenty of water, your cell phone, and other safety supplies (have a roo-bar on the front of the car). In case of a breakdown or other emergency, never leave your vehicle. The biggest risk is for people who walk away from their cars to look for water or assistance—wandering around until their bodies dehydrate and they become delusional.

Language

English is the official language of Australia; it is spoken by 95 percent of the population. Australian grammar and spelling are a mix of British and American patterns. For example, the Australian majority party is spelled “Labor” (American spelling), not “Labour” (British spelling). The Web site www.ethnologue.com lists 268 languages in Australia, and of those, 235 are living languages.

Cultural Note

Although most Australians speak English, communication problems can—and do—exist with foreign English speakers. An extensive accent and slang have developed that make spoken Australian English quite unique. “Aorta” is a good example of how an Aussie makes the words “They ought to . . .” sound. Some idiomatic differences in “Strine” (Australian) include:

“Full bottle” = fully informed, knowledgeable

“Ringer” = An outstanding performer

“Ripper” = Terrific, fantastic (A ripper game, night, etc.)

“Tucker” = Food

“Barbie” = A barbecue pit, or the quintessential party that goes on all summer in an Australian’s yard.

Australians tend to shorten words to one syllable and then add a long e sound to the end. Therefore, a mosquito becomes a "mozzi" and the people are known as "Auzzies" rather than Australians. Avoid the terms "stuffed" (which is said in the United States after one eats too much) and "rooting" (which those in the United States do for their favorite team); both these terms have vulgar connotations in Australia.

The Australian View

Because of their isolation, Australians are comfortable doing business with people they never meet. They may wish to communicate via e-mails, conference calls, Webex, or phone. If face-to-face meetings are possible, Australians are extremely approachable, but even if you cannot fly to Canberra or Sydney, it does not preclude working together.

Australians are creative, curious, and not averse to risk—they generally adopt new technologies as soon as they are available. Their independent, self-reliant viewpoint explains why they will often try major projects themselves, and then ask for help from "professionals" if they find it too difficult.

Christians make up approximately 75 percent of the population, but that percentage does not reflect the actual number of people who attend religious meetings. Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists are also present. A significant proportion of Australians (almost 13 percent) claim no religious affiliation.



Know Before You Go

Driving is on the left in Australia. Remember to wear your seat belt (even in a taxi), and watch out for "road trains," which are trucks with multiple trailers (or carriages) linked together. Try not to drive around dawn or dusk to avoid colliding with a kangaroo in nonurban areas.

Remember that the seasons in the Southern Hemisphere are the reverse of the Northern. The hottest months in Australia are from November through March. But the peak travel seasons are during the midwinter in Australia—June, July, and August.

Australia's climate varies—from severe droughts and forest fires, to cyclones along the coast. In 2003, more than 500 homes were destroyed by bushfire in Canberra, the capital. Fires also spread across Tasmania, Victoria, and New South Wales.



CULTURAL ORIENTATION

Cognitive Styles: How Australians Organize and Process Information

Australians are individually open-minded and trusting of equals until given reason not to be. They are quite analytical and conceptual in their thinking. Rules and laws almost always take precedence over personal or emotional feelings about an issue. Company policy is followed regardless of who is doing the negotiating.

Negotiation Strategies: What Australians Accept as Evidence

Facts are given the highest validity because Australians tend to reason from an objective perspective. Little credence is given to feelings, as personal emotions are untrustworthy. Australians are highly ethnocentric, so a basic faith in their nation may underlie some of their arguments.

Value Systems: The Basis for Behavior

The Judeo-Christian ethic pervades most behavior, but material progress is more important than humanistic progress. The following three sections identify the Value Systems in the predominant culture—their methods of dividing right from wrong, good from evil, and so forth.

Locus of Decision-Making

Individualism is very important in decision-making, but it is subject to company policy. Australians do not find it difficult to say “no.” A person’s life is private and not to be discussed in business negotiations. True friendships are few and highly valued.

Sources of Anxiety Reduction

There is low anxiety about life, as external structures (democracy, organizations, and scientific method) provide stability and insulation from life. The nuclear family is the rule and is the strongest socializing force. There are established rules for everything. Anxieties sometimes develop over deadlines and expected results.

Issues of Equality/Inequality

Egalitarianism stresses a high minimum standard of well-being for the whole of society and an outward show of equality that minimizes privileges associated with formal rank. Emphasis is on an individual’s ability. Traditional sex roles are changing rapidly, but women are still fighting for equality in pay and power.



BUSINESS PRACTICES

Punctuality, Appointments, and Local Time

- Be punctual to meetings. To Australian businesspeople, tardiness signals a careless business attitude.
- As an employer, however, it is not always easy to get punctuality out of traditionally anti-authoritarian Australian employees. It’s not enough to request that people arrive on time; you have to prove that their tardiness causes harm.
- Appointments are relatively easy to schedule at all corporate levels. Most executives are friendly and open to discussions. Make arrangements for in-person meetings weeks in advance.

- The best time to visit is from March through November, as the peak tourist season is December through February. Christmas and Easter are especially hectic; many executives will be on vacation.
- Along with official holidays, each Australian state also celebrates additional holidays. The Queen's Birthday is celebrated—but not on the same day in each state! For the official holidays of Australia, visit www.kissboworshakehands.com.
- Australia has three time zones. The westernmost zone, which includes the city of Perth, is eight hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T. +8). The central zone, which encompasses Adelaide, Alice Springs, and Darwin, is 9½ hours ahead of G.M.T. (G.M.T. +9½). The easternmost zone (the closest to the Americas) is ten hours ahead of G.M.T. (G.M.T. +10). Most of the big cities are in this zone, including Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra (the national capital). The Australians name these time zones Eastern, Central, and Western Standard Time, respectively.
- All of Australia practices daylight-saving time except Queensland and western Australia, which remain on standard time throughout the year.

Negotiating

- Australians generally do not like skewed negotiations or high-pressure sales. They value directness. Therefore, present your case in a forthright manner, articulating both the good and the bad.
- Modesty and casualness are Australian characteristics. A business presentation filled with hype and excitement will not impress Australians; instead, it will inspire them to deflate the presenter with caustic humor.
- Australians may emphasize profit over market share.
- Do not digress or go into too much detail. As we stated, laconic Australians consider brevity a virtue.
- Decision-making takes place with the consultation of top management. This takes time—be patient.
- Australians are very direct and love to banter. If you are teased, take it in good humor.
- Australians are wary of authority and of those who consider themselves “better” than others. Be modest in interactions, and downplay your knowledge and expertise. Let your accomplishments speak for themselves. More than one Australian has complained that eager young U.S. executives “sound like walking resumes” because they are so quick to list their accomplishments and qualifications.
- Before beginning business meetings, spend a brief period of time in small talk. This social time will be short but will establish a familiar rapport, which is important to Australians.
- If you are invited out for a drink to establish a friendly relationship, do not talk about business unless your host brings it up. Work and play are taken equally seriously in Australia and are not to be confused.

Business Entertaining

- Australians do not make unannounced visits; always call ahead.
- In an Australian pub, it is vital to remember that each person pays for a round of drinks. Missing your turn to “shout for a round” is a sure way to make a bad impression.
- Australians don’t invite strangers into their homes right away. They take their time getting to know someone before an invitation is made. Barbecues are a favorite reason for gathering.
- Good conversation topics are sports, which are very popular, and sightseeing, because Australians are very proud of their country. Politics and religion are taken very seriously, so expect some strong opinions if you discuss these topics.
- Remember that Australians respect people with opinions, even if those opinions conflict with their own. Arguments are considered entertaining, so do not be shy about espousing any truly held beliefs. People who are afraid of candor and cannot frankly express themselves are not respected.
- That said, if you bring up inappropriate topics like politics, religion, or Australia’s treatment of the Aborigines, you may become engaged in an unpleasant conversation that can be destructive to your business relationship. Pick less volatile topics.
- Allegations exist that U.S. intelligence services intervened covertly in the 1980 Australian national elections. Whether this is true or not, many Australians believe it. It is a tossup, which they resent more: CIA interference in their elections or the implication that Australia is in the same league as so-called banana republics where the United States has toppled governments with impunity.

Cultural Note

Your best approach is to be friendly, relaxed, modest, and unpretentious. Australians find it amusing how hard foreigners (especially North Americans) try to make a good impression. Australians are very difficult to impress . . . and if you did impress them, they would not admit it.

The usual advice is “just be yourself” in dealing with Australians. However, if your usual demeanor is wired, nervous, officious, or self-important, you should downplay those aspects of your personality.



PROTOCOL

Greetings

- Australians are friendly and easy to get to know. They do not have the British reserve of their ancestors. It is acceptable for visitors to introduce themselves in social situations.
- Australians greet each other with “Hello” or “How are you?” The informal “G’day” is not as common as it was, and they tire of hearing tourists overusing it.

- It is the custom to shake hands at the beginning and end of a meeting. The handshake is usually firm, but not bone-crushing. Women may shake hands with one another, or they may give a kiss on the cheek in greeting.
- Strong eye contact is very important—it implies a clear, honest communication.
- Don't get too close during a conversation—Australians like about two feet of space around them.
- It is appropriate to present a business card at an introduction, but don't be surprised if you do not get one in return.

Titles/Forms of Address

- Full names are used for initial greetings, and "sir" is an address of respect.
- Australians are quick to go to a first-name basis. Wait for them to initiate this as a cue for you to do the same.
- "Mate" will be heard far more often than "sir." It refers to anyone of one's own sex, but when used with the pronoun "my" (e.g., "my mates"), it refers to one's friends. Women also refer to other women as "mate."
- As part of Australia's classless society, academic qualifications are downplayed—in public. Australians will make sport of anyone who sounds like a resume, quoting his or her qualifications and experience.
- Follow the lead of others in using titles. In Australia, a title—whether academic or job-related—does not command respect in and of itself. The individual must still win the respect of others.

Gestures

- Raising one or two fingers up in the air can be considered rude.
- For a man to wink at a woman, even when being friendly, is inappropriate.
- Men should not be too physically demonstrative with other men. Do not put your arm around another man's shoulders, unless you are very good friends.

Gifts

- Australians do not generally give gifts in a business context. If you are invited to a home for dinner, however, you may want to bring a small gift of flowers, wine, chocolates, or folk crafts from home.
- As a foreigner, an illustrated book from your home area makes a good gift. You may also bring a preserved food product from your home area, but it will be confiscated by Australian customs unless it is in a can or bottle. MP3 players, handheld satellite locators, and other electronics that can be used outside on trails, etc., are very nice gifts.

Dress

- Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere, so the seasons are opposite to those of North America. Most of the country is tropical, but with Australia's great size, this varies. Southern Australia has warm summers and mild winters, so light clothing is best. During winter months, warmer clothes and rain gear are needed.
- Casual dress is very informal. Shorts are quite common (sometimes, even at work).
- Business dress for visiting executives is conservative. Men may wear a high-quality dark suit and tie. Businesswomen wear suits, dresses, or pantsuits.

Cultural Note

The theology of Aborigines is found in their Dreamtime stories and their artwork. The Spirits from the Dreamtime created everything and reside in Australia's Sacred Sites. When Aborigines re-enact Dreamtime stories, or practice certain ceremonies, or create certain art, they feel a deep spiritual connection with the Dreamtime spirits.