

## AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

Australia and New Zealand are a very long way from anywhere, but that does not stop people from wanting to go there. To the Aborigines and Māori, these two countries were new homes that they could make their own. To the British, they were a place to put prisoners, and a land that could grow food for the hungry people of Britain. And today people go there from Asia, Europe, and almost every country in the world, to live there or just to visit.

And the most unusual things are waiting there. Farms as big as the country of England, and the steepest street in the world – it is hard to walk up it, and even harder to walk down! The biggest rock in the world, and a city where everyone has a holiday once a year – for a horse race. An animal with three eyes, and eleven men who do not play rugby until they have done a very frightening dance. If you are ready for surprises, come and see what life is like ‘down under’.



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*Factfiles*

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## Australia and New Zealand

Stage 3 (1000 headwords)

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Australia  
and  
New Zealand



OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

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# 1 An enormous land

What kind of country is Australia? Firstly, Australia is big – 7,686,848 square kilometres. In fact, only five countries in the world – Russia, Canada, the United States, China, and Brazil – are larger than Australia. One part of Australia, Western Australia, is four times as big as Texas, or eleven times as big as Great Britain. The journey from Perth in the west to Sydney in the east takes about four hours by plane; that is longer than the journey from Madrid to Moscow. And if you walk all around Australia along the coast, you will travel 25,760 kilometres.

Australia is also low and flat; only 5 per cent of the land is above 600 metres. But there are mountains in south-east Australia and in Tasmania. The highest mountain is Mount Kosciuszko, at 2,228 metres. It is in the Great Dividing Range, near the eastern coast.

Australia is hot and dry too. Two-thirds of the country, mostly in the centre and the west, is desert. There are hills and big dry salt lakes, and it is very difficult to grow anything. The temperature is often 35 °C or more in the summer months, and not many people live there.

There are some big rivers, like the Murray-Darling, which is 2,700 kilometres long, but in parts of Australia it sometimes does not rain for years, and 80 per cent of the country gets less than 600 millimetres of rain a year.

In the north, half of the year is 'wet', and half is 'dry'. From November to April heavy rain fills the rivers and makes enormous lakes where thousands of birds come for the

summer. From May to October the north is often sunny and dry for weeks, and it is a popular place for winter holidays in the sun. *Winter* holidays? On this side of the world, of course, the seasons are different from the seasons in northern countries; December is in the summer, and June is in the winter.

Tasmania is cooler and wetter than the rest of Australia, with high mountains, thick forests, and some of the world's oldest trees.

So although it is true that much of Australia is flat and dry, it also has hills and mountains, rainforests, deep river valleys, and wonderful beaches.

In all of this enormous country there are only 20 million people. Most of them live close to the coast in the east, south-east and south of the country, where the summers are warm and the winters not too cold. There are only 2.6 people to every square kilometre in Australia – one of the lowest numbers in the world. (In Singapore, for example, there are 6,208 people to every square kilometre.) In fact, this means that there are large parts of the country with very few people at all. And 84 per cent of the people in Australia live on just 1 per cent of the land!

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## 2 Australia's past

The first people in Australia were the Aborigines, who came more than 40,000 years ago from South East Asia. Chinese sailors visited 2,500 years ago, and much later Dutch sailors came – Willem Janszoon in 1606, and Abel Tasman in 1642. The Dutch made maps of the north and west coasts of Australia, but they did not try to live there. Then in 1770 the British sailor Captain James Cook landed on the east coast, and said that Australia now belonged to Britain. Nobody asked the Aborigines about this, and it was the beginning of a terrible time for them.

Until the 1780s Britain had sent convicts to the United States when it had too many of them for its prisons. After the Americans won the War of Independence in 1783, the British had to find a new answer to this problem – and the answer was Australia. In May 1787, eleven ships sailed from Portsmouth in England carrying 772 convicts. They reached Port Jackson – now Sydney – on 26 January 1788. Life was very difficult, and the convicts had to work very hard, making roads, buildings, and farms. In 1803, convicts were sent to Tasmania too. A few years later, people began to come from Britain because they chose to make a new life in Australia, and they went to live in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland as well as New South Wales.

In 1851 gold was found in New South Wales and Victoria. Thousands of people went looking for gold – first Australians, then people from North America, Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, and China. In ten years the population grew from

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400,000 to 1,200,000. With the gold came new roads and railways and growing cities.

On 1 January 1901 the six Australian states – New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia, and Tasmania – became one country. Britain was still very important to Australia; many people left Britain for a new life in Australia, but they still called Britain ‘home’.

During the First World War (1914–1918) thousands of Australian soldiers went to fight for Britain in Europe, and more than 60,000 of them died. In the Second World War (1939–1945) Australians fought in Europe and Asia, first helping Britain and then the United States.

After 1945 the Australian government realized that Australia needed more people, and they opened the country to immigrants. People still came from Britain, but others came from countries like Italy, Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Turkey, and the Lebanon. Since 1945 more than 6.5 million people have moved there, and recently people from countries like Vietnam and Cambodia have moved there too.



### 3

## Eight cities and the outback

In each of Australia's six states – New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Tasmania – there is a large city which is near a river and near the sea. More than half of all Australians live in these six cities – and many others live near to them. In fact, most people live only a few kilometres from the sea.

Sydney, in New South Wales, is the oldest and biggest city, with 4.2 million people. It is built around an enormous harbour – some say that it is the biggest natural harbour in the world. It is a busy modern city and its tall buildings are the centre for a lot of Australian business. It is also an international city where you can eat food from all over the world, or just visit some of the thirty wonderful beaches!

When they think of Sydney, many people think of the Sydney Opera House. The roof of this beautiful building looks like sails on Sydney Harbour. It was opened in 1973 for music, theatre, and dance. Near the Opera House is one of the longest bridges in the world – Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Melbourne, in the state of Victoria, is the second biggest city, with 3.7 million people, and it was the capital of Australia from 1901 to 1927. In the 1880s people built many fine buildings in this rich city, and many of them are still there today. It has wide streets, some lovely old buildings, and many large parks and gardens. Like Sydney, it is home to

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many immigrants, and it has a large Chinatown. Melbourne's theatres and pubs are famous, and it is a popular centre for art, music, and festivals of many kinds.

Brisbane is in Queensland, on the east coast. Here the temperature can get very hot, and you can still find stilt houses – wooden houses on tall posts which let cool air under the house. Brisbane is an important centre for business, and many tourists also come to visit the city on their way to the beaches of Queensland or the Great Barrier Reef.

Adelaide in South Australia is called the City of Churches, and it is also famous for its city plan, which put parks all round the city centre. It has famous festivals of music, theatre, and film, and the WOMADelaide festival of world music and dance. From Adelaide many visitors travel to the Barossa Valley, where German immigrants began making wine in the nineteenth century. Some of Australia's best wine comes from here today.

**YOU HAVE REACHED THE END OF THE SAMPLE.**