

Australia



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Australia Highlights

Australia is one hot spot, but why is it that people are headed to the land down under in droves?

We asked some fellow Australians why they love this vast brown land we call home. They've packed their 4WDs and headed off into the outback, snorkelled, dived and surfed their way along the coast and explored ancient forests and Indigenous art centres. Here are their top picks.

Welcome, enjoy and explore, and find out why Lonely Planet calls Australia home.



JULIET COOMBE



ULURU, NORTHERN TERRITORY

If you're looking for a place that makes you feel like you're in an ancient universe, then Uluru (p887) in the Northern Territory is the place for you! This ancient, sacred Indigenous place is an awe-inspiring natural phenomenon, and its undeniable air of spirituality and sheer presence are simply incredible! Uluru will hold you in a trance because of the way the rock seems to throb and move from sunrise to sundown. It's the time, light and space of the majestic Uluru that really makes it rock.

The ancient Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara Aboriginal peoples protect Uluru and want to share their beautiful home with you.

Catherine Freeman, Former Olympian



RICHARD FANSON



THE WHITSUNDAYS, QUEENSLAND

The Whitsundays (p408) are one of the best areas to visit in the world. Try to get away from the big island resorts and visit the little places. The best way is to get onto a boat and cruise around. There are plenty of charters going out every day. If your budget allows, there are boats you can rent and skipper yourself – absolutely magic. Anchoring for the night in a secluded bay with no one around under a million stars is about as good as it gets. And if you go at the right time of year you will see whales migrating, dolphins swimming, turtles cruising by. It is truly paradise! I think I'll head up there again myself – see you out there.

Jimmy Barnes, Musician

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INFORMATION

Tourism New South Wales (☎ 02-9931 1111; www.visitnsw.com.au), the state's tourism body, is a good source for information, ideas and contacts. Lonely Planet's *New South Wales* guide is an excellent resource for getting the most out of your time.

Some helpful websites:

www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au Information about national park access (including access for mobility-impaired visitors), camping permits, walking tracks, conservation, Aboriginal heritage and children's activities.

www.nrma.com.au If you're hiring or buying a car, find out about insurance, road maps and guides. You can also book accommodation and tours online.

www.nsw.gov.au Bypass the boring parliamentary information and check out the leads to festivals, markets, galleries, Aboriginal heritage and more.

NATIONAL PARKS

There are over 780 exceptionally diverse national parks and reserves in NSW, from the subtropical rainforest of the Border Ranges and white peaks of the Snowy Mountains to the haunting, fragile landscapes of the outback. In reasonable weather most parks and reserves are accessible by conventional vehicle. With the exception of those surrounding Sydney, public transport into most parks is scarce.

The **NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service** (NPWS; www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) does an excellent job. Many parks have visitor centres with detailed information on the area, walking tracks and camping options. Where there isn't one, visit the nearest NPWS office for information.

Some of the must-sees include the theatrical rock formations of Ben Boyd National Park (p239), the emerald forests of Nightcap National Park (p203) and the stunning dunes and coastal heaths of Hat Head National Park (p184).

The Border Ranges National Park (p204) is a twitcher's utopia with over 170 bird species. Richmond Range National Park (p214) and Willandra National Park (p254) are both World Heritage listed, the former encompassing forgotten rainforests and the latter ancient lakes fringed by crescent-shaped dunes.

Spectacular Kosciuszko National Park (p242) has rugged white-capped mountains. In stark contrast, Sturt National Park (p258) protects an enormous arid landscape of rolling red sand dunes.

Forty-four of the parks charge daily entry fees, generally \$7 per car (less for motorcycles and pedestrians). If you plan on visiting a number of parks then the annual pass, which gives unlimited entry to all the state's parks is worthwhile; prices start at \$22.

Many parks have campsites with facilities; some are free, others cost between \$5 and \$10 a night per person. Popular sites are often booked out during holidays. Bush camping is allowed in some parks; contact the NPWS office for regulations.

ACTIVITIES

Australiana Activities

The town of Woolli (p190) has revived the oddly named sport of goanna pulling, where

NEW SOUTH WALES FACTS

Eat Rock oysters, rock lobsters, yabbies and prawns; also Turkish bread 'sangers' and Tim Tam shooters

Drink A flat white, freshly squeezed fruit juice, Shiraz from the Hunter Valley and a bottle of Barons Pale Ale

Read The 2008 Booker Prize-nominated *A Fraction of the Whole* by Steve Toltz, *Unreliable Memoirs* by Clive James and *The Penguin Book of the Road*, the perfect Aussie road-trip companion

Listen to *Apocalypso* by The Presets, *Young Modern* by Silverchair, *Chimney's Afire* by Josh Pyke and the self-titled album by Sam Sparro

Watch *Puberty Blues* (1981), *Muriel's Wedding* (1994), *Candy* (2006), *Newcastle* (2008) and the TV series *Love My Way* (2004-07)

Avoid Getting sunburnt and supporting any other country than Australia when watching international sporting matches (at least vocally anyway)

Locals' nickname Sydneysiders

Swim at Bondi (p117) and Byron Bay (p195), two of NSW's most iconic beaches

Strangest festival The Parkes Elvis Festival (p218)

Tackiest tourist attraction The Big Banana (p186)

ABORIGINAL NEW SOUTH WALES

On the beaches and rocky outcrops of Sydney Harbour, the Eora people and their neighbours hunted and fished for thousands of years. A person travelling around the harbour in Aboriginal times would have encountered several different peoples. Each group maintained their own distinct beliefs or 'Dreaming'. And each spoke their own language – including Dharug, Tharawal, Gundungurra and Kuring-gai. This linguistic diversity was found across the entire continent.

The Aborigines' world changed forever on 19 April 1770, when Lieutenant James Cook of the British Navy sailed into Botany Bay. The story goes that Cook, his head filled with notions of 'noble savages', was respectful towards the Indigenous population and later reported back on their peaceable nature.

However, when Captain Phillip's penal settlement came to town, kidnappings and punishment became the norm, with the explicit aim of terrifying Aborigines into submission. Smallpox, introduced by the invaders, also decimated the local population, which had no resistance to such a disease. But there was resistance in other forms: Aboriginal freedom-fighting groups began to spring up, led by storied indigenous figures including Bennelong, Pemulwuy and Mosquito, a warrior from a Broken Bay people. The freedom fighters were eventually crushed as the settlers resorted to ever more barbaric methods to achieve total domination.

There were somewhere between 500,000 and one million Aboriginal peoples in Australia before the British arrived, and more than 250 regional languages. Sydney Cove had an Indigenous population of around 3000, using three main languages encompassing several dialects and subgroups. Kuring-gai (derived from the nomenclature 'Koori') was generally spoken on the northern shore, Tharawal along the coast south of Botany Bay, and Dharug and its dialects near the Blue Mountains.

Quite a few words from NSW Aboriginal language are still in common usage in Australian English, including galah, kookaburra, dingo, koala, wallaby and billabong.

Today there are an estimated 148,200 Aboriginal people in NSW, and the Sydney region is estimated to have over 40,000 Indigenous inhabitants, mostly descended from migratory inland peoples.

NSW is littered with opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of Indigenous culture and heritage. Aboriginal rock art and engravings can be seen in Bondi (p117), Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (p150), the Blue Mountains (p154) and in Brisbane Water National Park (p162), near Gosford.

The NSW outback has many sites of Aboriginal heritage, including Mt Gunderbooka (p257) and the wonderful Mt Grenfell Historic Site (p259).

There are many acclaimed galleries focusing on Aboriginal art in Sydney (p142) and Broken Hill (p261).

But the best way to experience indigenous culture is at a cultural centre. Trips to the Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Cultural Centre (p156) in Penrith, the Aboriginal Cultural Centre & Keeping Place (p209) in Armidale, and the Umbarra Cultural Centre (p237) near Bermagui will provide a deeper appreciation of the way the traditional custodians of those areas used the land, and of their life and heritage.

There are also highly recommended Aboriginal tours throughout the state listed under individual towns and parks in this chapter.

For more information, go to www.visitnsw.com.au and follow the links to Aboriginal Culture under Activities and Attractions, or www.indigenoustourism.australia.com for links to Indigenous-owned and -operated tour and accommodation operators, as well as artists and art organisations.

grown men and women wearing leather harnesses try to pull each other's heads off.

Blokes and sheilas compete for titles such as 'Chick's Ute' and 'Feral Ute' at Deniliquin's Ute Muster (p255), and at Lightning Ridge's annual Goat Race (p223) locals and tourists don crash helmets and, erm, race goats.

Bushwalking

Almost every national park has marked trails or wilderness walking opportunities, ranging from short stomps to longer, more challenging treks.

In Sydney, it's worth picking up a copy of *Sydney's Best Harbour & Coastal Walks*

published by the *Sydney Morning Herald*. It includes the must-do 6km Bondi to Coogee Coastal Walk (p117) and the beautiful 10km Manly Scenic Walkway (p121) in addition to wilder walks.

Near Sydney, the wilderness areas of Royal National Park (p147) hide dramatic cliff-top walks including a 28km coastal walking trail. There are smaller bushwalks around the inlets of Broken Bay in Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park (p150). If you're up for a lengthy trek, tackle the Great North Walk (p163) between Sydney and Newcastle.

West of Sydney, the sandstone bluffs, eucalyptus forests and wildflowers of the Blue Mountains (p155) make for a breathtaking experience, as does the walk to the summit of Australia's highest peak, Mt Kosciuszko (2228m), in Kosciuszko National Park (p242).

In the state's northwest, Warrumbungle National Park (p222), with its volcanic peaks, has over 30km of trails to keep you hale and strong. Keen trampers should try the 15km Syndicate Ridge Walking Trail near Bellingen (p212), the 42km Six Foot Track (p161) to the Jenolan Caves, or the spectacular 50km Nadgee Howe Wilderness Walk trail in Ben Boyd National Park (p239).

Outdoor stockists are good sources of bushwalking information. Also try the **NPWS** (www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au) and the **Confederation of Bushwalking Clubs NSW** (www.bushwalking.org.au).

Lonely Planet's *Walking in Australia* provides maps and descriptions of 17 major trails throughout NSW.

Canyoning

Canyoning combines rock climbing, abseiling, swimming and bushwalking, with lots of rock scrambling and jumping in water. If negotiating narrow crevices while getting soaking wet sounds fun (it is!), then consider the Blue Mountains (p156), where there are trips to suit most levels.

There's also great abseiling to be found in the Snowy Mountains, particularly around Jindabyne (p241).

Cycling

Cycling in Sydney's kamikaze traffic is no fun, so head off-road on a mountain bike instead. The national parks around Sydney, the Blue Mountains (p153) and the Great North Road around the Hawkesbury River (p152) offer stunning challenges. In the southeast,

mountain biking is a warm-weather favourite in Thredbo (p244).

Bicycle NSW (Map pp102-3; ☎ 02-9218 5400; www.bicyclensw.org.au; Level 5, 822 George St, Sydney) provides information and guides for cycling routes throughout the state, as well as the bimonthly magazine *Australian Cyclist*.

The **Bicycles Network Australia** (www.bicycles.net.au) website is useful, as is Lonely Planet's *Cycling Australia*.

Diving & Snorkelling

There are over 30 diving destinations in Sydney alone. See Sydney's Best Beaches p118 for a list of the best shore and boat dives.

North of Sydney try Broughton Island near Port Stephens (p174), while Fish Rock Cave off South West Rocks (p184) is renowned for its excellent diving, with shells, schools of clownfish and humpback whales. Swim with grey nurse sharks at The Pinnacles near Forster (p177) and leopard sharks at Julian Rocks Marine Reserve off Byron Bay (p197). Good dive schools can be found at Coffs Harbour (p187) and Byron Bay (p197).

On the South Coast popular diving spots include Jervis Bay (p233), pretty Montague Island (p236) and Merimbula (p237).

Diving outfits typically offer four-day **PADI courses** (Professional Association of Diving Instructors; www.padi.com).

Skiing & Snowboarding

Snowfields criss-cross the NSW-Victoria border. The season is relatively short (mid-June to early September) and snowfalls can be unpredictable. Cross-country skiing is popular and most resorts offer lessons and equipment.

The Snowy Mountains (p239) boasts popular resorts including Charlotte Pass, Perisher Blue, Selwyn and Thredbo.

Skiing Australia (www.skiingaustralia.org.au) details the major resorts and race clubs.

Surfing & Swimming

For the low-down on Sydney's top surfing and swimming spots, see p120 and p121.

You can also fine-tune your surfing skills (or indeed learn some) at Newcastle (p165), Port Macquarie (p181) and Coffs Harbour (p187). Crescent Head (p183) is the longboarding capital of Australia, and the gnarly swells at Angourie Point (p192) are for seasoned surfers and/or nutcases only. Further

MAP LEGEND

ROUTES

	Tollway		Mall/Steps
	Freeway		Tunnel
	Primary		Pedestrian Overpass
	Secondary		Walking Tour
	Tertiary		Walking Tour Detour
	Lane		Walking Trail
	Under Construction		Track
	Unsealed Road		
	One-Way Street		

TRANSPORT

	Ferry		Rail
	Metro		Rail (Underground)
	Monorail		Tram
	Bus Route		Cable Car, Funicular

HYDROGRAPHY

	River, Creek		Canal
	Intermittent River		Water
	Swamp		Lake (Dry)
	Mangrove		Lake (Salt)
	Reef		Mudflats

BOUNDARIES

	International State, Provincial Marine Park		Regional, Suburb Ancient Wall
			Cliff

AREA FEATURES

	Airport		Land
	Area of Interest		Mall
	Beach, Desert		Market
	Building		Park
	Campus		Reservation
	Cemetery, Christian Cemetery, Other		Rocks
	Forest		Sports
			Urban

POPULATION

	CAPITAL (NATIONAL)		CAPITAL (STATE)
	Large City		Medium City
	Small City		Town, Village

SYMBOLS

	Sights/Activities		Eating		Information
	Beach		Drinking		Bank, ATM
	Bodysurfing		Cafe		Embassy/Consulate
	Christian		Entertainment		Hospital, Medical
	Diving, Snorkelling		Shopping		Information
	Golf		Sleeping		Internet Facilities
	Islamic		Transport		Police Station
	Jewish		Airport, Airfield		Post Office, GPO
	Monument		Bus Station		Telephone
	Museum, Gallery		Cycling, Bicycle Path		Toilets
	Point of Interest		General Transport		Geographic
	Pool		Parking Area		Lighthouse
	Ruin		Petrol Station		Lookout
	Skiing		Taxi Rank		Mountain, Volcano
	Surfing, Surf Beach				National Park
	Trail Head				Picnic Area
	Winery, Vineyard				River Flow
	Zoo, Bird Sanctuary				Waterfall

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