

Chapter 1

Welcome to Australia

G'Day, Mate!



THE FIRST THING MOST PEOPLE THINK ABOUT when it comes to Australia is the kangaroo. And for good reason. Australia and the neighboring island of Papua New Guinea are the only two countries in the world where these unique **mammals** live.

But there is much more to Australia than kangaroos -- from the Great Barrier Reef to the Aboriginal peoples to the wide-open spaces of the Australian outback.

Read on to discover more about this awesome country. One thing is for sure. Wherever you go, you're sure to hear the friendly Aussie greeting—"G'day, Mate.

Where in the World Is Australia?



YOU’VE PROBABLY HEARD PEOPLE SAY that Australia is a country “down under.” But where exactly is “down under”? The term comes from the fact that Australia is located below the **equator**. It is in the Southern Hemisphere between the Pacific Ocean (to the east) and the Indian Ocean (to the west).

Australia shares no land borders with any other country. In fact, the closest country to Australia is 1,471 miles (2,368 km) away. That country is Papua New Guinea. Even New Zealand, which many people often think is close to Australia, is actually more than 2,581 miles (4,154 km) away. That’s about as far as it is from Philadelphia to Los Angeles.

This awesome country is the sixth largest country (by area) in the world. It is also both the world’s largest island and the world’s smallest continent.

Did You Know?

No part of Australia is more than 621 miles (1000 km) from the ocean and a beach.

Cool Facts About Australia



The Aboriginal people invented the boomerang around 8,000 B.C. When this wooden weapon is thrown, it returns to its thrower.



In 1902, Australia became the second country in the world to give women the right to vote. (New Zealand was first in 1893).



The Sydney funnel-web spider is considered to be the world's most-deadly spider.

It can kill you in less than two hours.



The Sydney Opera House is one of the most amazing structures ever designed. Look at the roof. What does it look like to you? The architect says he got his idea for the design from the way an orange breaks apart.

It may come as a surprise to learn that the Australian Alps receive more snow each year than Switzerland!


The Aboriginal People



TRIBES OF INDIGENOUS people have lived in Australia for thousands of years. Yet, when the British first arrived in Australia in 1788, they decided that no one “owned” the land. So they claimed the land for the king and began to **colonize** the country.

In 1901, Australia was declared an independent country. Aboriginal people, however, were not allowed to become citizens of the new country—their country. That was bad enough. Yet, there was something even worse that took place.

Between 1910 and 1970, babies and children of Aboriginal parents were often taken from their families. The British believed that it was in the best interest of the child to be raised in a Christian family. The children were made to adopt the white culture. They were forbidden to speak their traditional language. Years later, these children became known as the Stolen Generations.



What does
“Everyone Belongs”
mean to you?

Not thinking
people's
differences
are weird.

Taking the
time to learn
more about
different
cultures.

Treating
everyone
fairly.

Not making
fun of what
people wear.

Accepting
different
customs and
beliefs.

An Imaginary Interview with An Australian Firefighter

BUSHFIRES HAPPEN OFTEN in Australia, particularly during the summer months. They can be both scary and sad and cause a great deal of destruction.

Suppose you could talk with someone about Australian bushfires. What questions would you ask? In this imaginary interview with an Australian firefighter, you can find out answers to questions kids ask most about bushfires.

What causes bushfires?

Lightning is one of the main causes of bushfires. But bushfires are also caused by human beings, either by accident or on purpose.

Does climate change cause bushfires?

No fire can be blamed on climate change alone. But many scientists say climate change can and does make bushfires worse and cause bushfires to happen more often.

I read that some careless people started the 2019/2020 bushfires.

Yes, that's true. In fact, more than 20 people were charged with starting the bushfires on purpose in the state of New South Wales. No one can understand why anyone would do such a thing.

7. Visit the Animals on Kangaroo Island

WITH A NAME LIKE KANGAROO ISLAND, it's got to be fun, right? And it is. You can see seals, dolphins, and wallabies. You can also see echidnas. (That's a type of anteater.) Oh, yeah, there are also plenty of Kangaroo Island Kangaroos. They are the smallest of all kangaroos.



On Kangaroo Island (AKA KI), kids can hand-feed kangaroos, koalas, and other animals. More than 1,500 different kinds of animals live on Kangaroo Island.

SPECIAL NOTE: The 2019/2020 wildfires in Australia destroyed more than 384,000 acres (155,000 hectares) of Kangaroo Island. That's a land area that is about half the size of the U.S. state of Rhode Island.

In addition, the fires killed thousands of koalas, kangaroos and other animals living on the small island. The fires also destroyed much of the food sources for the island's wildlife.

During this sad time, many people worked day and night to rescue as many animals as possible, provide them with food, and move them to safer areas of the island.

Still, many people have called the situation on Kangaroo Island an "ecological tragedy."

The Kangaroo and Other Australian Animals



Hi,
Guys.

THE KANGAROO IS A MARSUPIAL. A marsupial carries its newborn in a pouch. Other well-known marsupials include the koala, the wombat, and the scary Tasmania devil. (See page 32.) Most marsupials live in Australia. The only marsupial that lives in the U.S. is the opossum.