

Australia



Capital: Canberra

Largest city: Sydney

Population: 22.600.000

Form of government: Federal parliamentary democracy and constitutional monarchy

Independence: Jan. 1, 1901

Currency: Australian dollar

Drives on the left

Australia officially the Commonwealth of Australia, is a country in the Southern Hemisphere comprising the mainland of the Australian continent (the world's smallest), the island of Tasmania, and numerous smaller islands in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Neighbouring countries include Indonesia, East Timor, and Papua New Guinea to the north, the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and New Caledonia to the north-east, and New Zealand to the southeast.

On 1 January 1901 the six colonies became a federation and the Commonwealth of Australia was formed. As a Federation, Australia has maintained a stable liberal democratic political system and remains a Commonwealth realm. The population is concentrated in and around the mainland state capitals of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. The nation's capital city is Canberra, located in the Australian Capital Territory.

Etymology

The name *Australia* is derived from the Latin *australis*, meaning "southern".

The first recorded European sighting of the Australian mainland was made by the Dutch navigator Willem Janszoon, in 1606.

The United Kingdom formally claimed the western part of Australia in 1829.

States and territories



Australia has six states—New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and Western Australia—and two major mainland territories—the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). Each state and major mainland territory has its own legislature or parliament

The world's smallest continent and sixth largest country by total area, Australia is often considered the world's largest island.



The Great Barrier Reef, the world's largest coral reef, lies a short distance off the north-east coast and extends for over 2,000 kilometres. Mount Augustus, claimed to be the world's largest monolith, is located in Western Australia. At 2,228 metres Mount Kosciuszko on the Great Dividing Range is the highest mountain on the Australian mainland, although Mawson Peak on the remote Australian territory of Heard Island is taller at 2,745 metres.



Climate

By far, the largest part of Australia is desert or semi-arid lands commonly known as the outback. Australia is the flattest continent, with the oldest and least fertile soils, and is the driest inhabited continent. Only the south-east and south-west corners of the continent have a temperate climate. The population density is among the lowest in the world.

The landscapes of the northern part of the country, with a tropical climate, consist of rainforest, woodland, grassland, mangrove swamps, and desert. The climate is significantly influenced by ocean currents.

Politics

The Commonwealth of Australia is a constitutional democracy based on a federal division of powers. The form of government used in Australia is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary system of government. Queen Elizabeth II is the Queen of Australia.

Language

English is the national language. Australian English is a major variety of the language. Most of the estimated 22 million Australians are descended from colonial-era settlers and post-Federation immigrants from Europe, with almost 90% of the population being of European descent.

Economy

The Australian dollar is the currency of the Commonwealth of Australia. Australia is one of the most "laissez-faire" free market economies, according to indices of economic freedom. An emphasis on exporting commodities rather than manufactures had a significant increase in Australia's terms of trade during the rise in commodity prices since the start of the century.



Environment

Most Australian woody plant species are evergreen and many are adapted to fire and drought, including many eucalypts and acacias. Australia has a rich variety of endemic legume species. Among well-known Australian fauna comprises the marsupials, including the kangaroo, the koala, and the wombat; the saltwater and freshwater crocodiles; and birds such as the emu and the kookaburra. Australia is home to many dangerous animals including some of the most venomous snakes in the world. Many plant and

animal species became extinct soon after first human settlement, others have become extinct since European settlement.



The **flag of Australia** is the national flag of Australia. Its original design was chosen in 1901. The flag is a blue field with the Union Flag in the canton (upper hoist quarter), and a large white seven-pointed star known as the Commonwealth Star in the lower hoist quarter. The fly contains a representation of the Southern Cross constellation, made up of five white stars – one small five-pointed star and four, larger, seven-pointed stars.

The Union Flag is thought locally to symbolise Australia's history as six British colonies and the principles upon which the Australian Federation is based, although a more historic view sees its inclusion in the design as demonstrating loyalty to the British Empire.

The Commonwealth Star, a large white star (representing the 6 States of Australia and the Territories), originally had only six points, representing the six federating colonies. However, this changed in 1908 when a seventh point was added to symbolise the Territory of Papua and any future territories.

The Southern Cross is one of the most distinctive constellations visible in the Southern Hemisphere.