




What basic facts do you know about Australia?

What do you think makes Australia unique?

What can you tell me about Australian history?

What do you know about places to visit in Australia?

Could you describe some of Australia's geographical features?

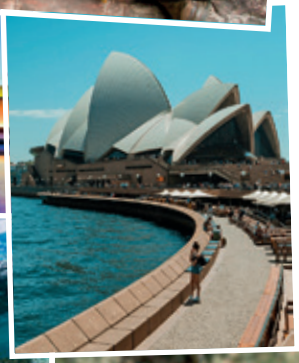
What can you tell me about the wildlife of Australia?

Could you name some famous Australians?

Do you know anything about sports and pastimes popular in Australia?

Would you like to go to Australia? Why?

























# MATURITA CARD AUSTRALIA

## Overview

Australia is the world's smallest continent and the only continent which is a single country. It is located south of Asia between the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Mainland Australia is made up of six states and two territories (New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory). About 26 million people live there. The main and official language of Australia is English. There used to be hundreds of indigenous languages, but many of these died out and the rest are endangered.

## Australian history

The earliest evidence of humans in Australia dates to around 65,000 years ago. Today's Aboriginals (indigenous Australians) are descended from those earliest migrations, which happened while the Australian and Asian continents were connected by land. Dutch explorers reached Australia in the 17th century but did not stay. In 1770, James Cook, a British explorer, claimed Australia for Britain, and in 1788 a colony was established in today's Sydney Harbour. Australia was originally settled as a penal colony: people were sent there as a punishment. In the 1850s, gold was discovered, and many people moved to Australia. Australia gained independence in 1901 when the six colonies agreed to become a federation. Today, Australia is a multicultural society, but Aboriginal Australians make up only 3% of the population.

## Australian government

Australia is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The head of state is the monarch of the United Kingdom, represented by the governor general. The federal government, which holds the real power, is led by the prime minister. The federal parliament has two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Voting is compulsory in Australia. If a voter does not give a good reason for not taking part in an election (e.g. illness), they are fined.

## Geography of Australia

Australia has a hot and dry centre. This part of Australia is called the outback, and it covers 70% of the country. There are tropical regions in the north with heavy rain; the south is milder with hot summers and cool winters. Bushfires and droughts are common. Most people live in cities near the sea, and there are many beaches. The most famous landform is Uluru, a large red rock in the centre of the country. It is 348 metres high and it is a special place for Australian Aboriginals. The Great Barrier Reef, along the coast of Queensland, is the world's largest coral reef. Australia's tallest mountain is Mount Kosciuszko (2,228 metres).

## Australian fauna and flora

Thanks to the climate and geographical isolation of the continent, Australia has unique animals that do not live anywhere else. The Australian marsupials (animals that carry their babies in pouches) include kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, Tasmanian devils and wombats. The platypus and the echidna are the world's only egg-laying mammals. The dingo is Australia's wild dog. Australian birds include the cassowary and emu (large flightless birds) and the kookaburra, known for a loud call resembling human laughter. Dangerous animals include sharks, box jellyfish, crocodiles and venomous snakes and spiders. Plants include eucalypts (also called gum trees) and acacia trees (wattles).

## Major cities

The capital city of Australia is Canberra, which is in the south-east. It is the seat of the federal government, and about 490,000 people live there. The two biggest cities are Sydney, in New South Wales, and Melbourne, in Victoria. Each of these has nearly five million inhabitants. Sydney is famous for the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Melbourne is called the cultural capital of Australia and is famous for theatre, music and street art. Other major cities include Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide.

## Famous people

Famous Australians include the feminist Germaine Greer; the Aboriginal activist Eddie Mabo; Steve Irwin, a naturalist and TV personality; Kylie Minogue, a singer; Cate Blanchett, Nicole Kidman, Russell Crowe, Hugh Jackman and Chris Hemsworth, actors; Cathy Freeman, a sprinter; and Ian Thorpe, a swimmer.

## Sports and pastimes

Cricket, a bat-and-ball game, is the most popular summer sport. Other popular sports include rugby and Australian rules football, which both use an oval ball, and soccer. Australia is also famous for its beach culture, diving and surfing.