

**AMERICANS'
SURVIVAL GUIDE
to
AUSTRALIA
and
AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN
DICTIONARY
by
Rusty Geller**

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Dedication

To Sundance: one hell of a budgie.
She left us for the great billabong in the sky
just as I was finishing this book.
We'll miss her.

Acknowledgements

I moved to Australia from the U.S. when I was fifty. The transition looked deceptively simple. After all, I'd visited there a half-dozen times, I knew my way around, and the Aussies speak English—how hard could it be? I quickly found there's a big difference between being a tourist in a country and having to make a serious go of it. This book covers what I had to learn the first few years in order to survive.

Originally this was going to be a simple 500-word Australian-American dictionary. As things have a way of doing, it grew.

First I must apologize to my family and friends. In the name of research, I subverted many a social gathering into a cultural-linguistics lesson—with me as the pupil. I'd arrive with a list of a dozen Australianisms and emerge a few hours later with five times that many—the quantity seemed to increase in direct proportion to the amount of beer and wine consumed. I ended up with reams of information about Australian subjects I hadn't known existed. I soon realized that a mere list of Australianisms and their definitions wasn't going to be enough. I needed to write an introduction, which took a year and grew to almost 100,000 words. The dictionary alone would eventually top 1,500 entries.

I'd like to thank my Australian Brain Trust: John and Susie Wood; Chauncey, Fiona, Bruce, and Amanda Johnson; Adolpho and Claudia Zepeda; Gary and Trang Floyd; Mike, Marilyn, and Sian Davies; Jeremy and Jules Hurst. Also Peter Falk, Ian Sergeant, Spiro Mallis, Birgit Clark, Sue Ludemann Kristi Turner, Jack Seddon, Dr. Graham Thom, Ron Louis, Sandra Thornton, and Billy Hobbs. Thanks for putting up with the constant questions about things that must have seemed

perfectly obvious to you.

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And a very special thanks to the people of Australia for giving me such a ripe subject to write about and for allowing me to become a citizen of your country.

And finally, thanks to my dog, Lucky, who sat patiently at my feet every day waiting for me to finish writing. Now we can play...

Author’s Note: In the text, Aussie words and terms are printed in *italics*. The Australian/American dictionary is in the back. If you’re looking up a specific word or term, you might want to start with the dictionary. If you need more depth, check the Index or the Table of Contents to see if it’s covered in the text section—or you can read the whole darn thing.

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AMERICANS' SURVIVAL GUIDE to AUSTRALIA

and

AUSTRALIAN-AMERICAN DICTIONARY

“Welcome to Australia. Everything you know is irrelevant.”

Introduction

This book is intended as a reference guide for tourists, migrants, and business travellers to Australia. It covers the differences between American and Australian customs, culture, and language. When I refer to America, I mean the U.S. and Canada. Since North American culture and language is well known internationally, this book may also be helpful to visitors from other countries—and Aussies might even learn a thing or two.

It's a manual, a reference book, covering the basic and essential information this American author and his family had to learn during their first three years living in Australia. It will help you—for whatever the length of your stay—to avoid making the same embarrassing mistakes and asking the same dumb questions we did. Think of it as your cheat sheet.

I'd visited Australia a half dozen times before moving there, and I thought I knew the place. I soon discovered that being a tourist in a country, as opposed to actually having to make a life for yourself there, are two very different situations.

A tourist can enjoy things they like about a country and ignore the rest because they know they'll soon go home and leave it all behind. For these folks, this book should provide some background and help satisfy their curiosities.

For the business traveller, the information contained here will allow you to understand the people, culture, and customs, and help make your trip more successful. You can look like an old hand, even though it's your first time in the country.

For migrants or people on work contracts, this book should take the edge off your culture shock and make your transition easier and more graceful.

The first section contains information on the day-to-day things that you will encounter: driving, banking, eating out, shopping, and using a telephone. It will help you figure out what time it is in the next state, take measurements using the metric system, understand a bit about Australian sports, and get a feel for how the government and legal system works. It even takes a stab at explaining *Strine* (Australian English) and the Aussie mind-set.

The second section of this book is a dictionary of more than 1,500 Australian words, terms, and phrases, translated into North American English. It's probably the most complete list of Australianisms ever assembled.

Just because Americans and Australians speak a language based on English doesn't mean they use the same language. The big differences are obvious; it's the subtle differences that get you. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, we are "two peoples separated by a common language."

This book will help you navigate your way through Australian society. It will help you understand what's going on around you; things that might otherwise confuse you or would simply pass you by. It takes a critical look at Australia and does contain some opinion. All the facts as accurate as can be ascertained as of publication. Language and customs are constantly evolving. Meanings of words and phrases can vary by location and change with time.

Welcome to Australia. Keep your mind open as—like Alice—you step through the looking glass. Things are not as they seem...

"You're on your own, mate."

Australians are very independent people. They don't like to meddle in other people's business and they expect no one to meddle in theirs. This is part of the *Fair Go* attitude that is deeply ingrained in the Australian psyche: everyone deserves a chance, a "fair go". A fair go is an opportunity to succeed or fail on your own. It's yours; a gift from the Australian people. Good luck with it.

The down-side of this is, don't expect people to offer you help or advice—you're *on your own, mate*. If you do ask for

help, people will generally be glad to assist—in a reserved way—but part of your problem as a new arrival is that you won't know which questions to ask, or even that there is a question. Keep this book handy. It's the Operator's Manual for Australia.

“Are you from Canada?”

When Aussies pick up on your “North American” accent, they will likely ask if you're from Canada, not if you're from the U.S. This is partly because they run into more Canadians than Americans, but mostly it's because they know Canadians are sensitive to being mistaken for Americans, while Americans don't care.

As for Americans: when asked that question, don't be offended, it's a great opportunity to strike up a conversation. Outside of tourist areas, Americans are a novelty.

Australian overview

The name *Australia* comes from the Latin term “Terra Australis” or “Southern Land”. It's a continent surrounded by water, a giant island situated between Southeast Asia and Antarctica. The Pacific Ocean is on its east, the Southern Ocean is on its south, the Indian Ocean is on its west, the Timor Sea, the Arafura Sea, and the Torres Strait are on its north.

It's south of the equator, so all the seasons are reversed: winter is June, July, and August; summer is December, January, and February.

The country is almost the size of the continental United States, with the population of Southern California (as of 2007, Australia had 21 million people, while the U.S. had about 300 million). Population centers are along the east and west coasts, with three-quarters of the people living in the southeast corner. Forty percent of the population lives in Sydney and Melbourne, another twenty percent live in Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth.

Being a large land mass the size of the U.S., the climate varies. The northern regions of Australia share the same relative latitude (same distance from the equator) as the southern Caribbean. The southern coast of Australia shares the

same relative latitude as central California, while Tasmania (the island state off the southeast corner) is at the same relative latitude as Oregon or Massachusetts. Climates vary: the tropics are very humid and wet, with rain forests and mangrove swamps, the center of the continent is a dry desert, like Nevada on a bad day, the Australian “alps” (between Canberra and Melbourne), have 7,000-foot mountains that are snowed-in every winter. The central east coast, the southeast, and southwest corners are temperate, and that’s where most of the people live.

The Australian continent is surrounded by water, which buffers and moderates the coastal climate. The exception is the northern coast, where tropical cyclones or *typhoons* (Australian hurricanes) periodically strike during the summer months of December through March. This is euphemistically called *The Wet*.

Australia consists of six states and one territory. They are, in clockwise order: Queensland (capital, Brisbane), New South Wales (capital, Sydney), Victoria (capital, Melbourne, [pronounced *Mel-bun*]), Tasmania (capital, Hobart), South Australia (capital, Adelaide), Western Australia (capital, Perth), and the Northern Territory (capital, Darwin). There’s also the national capital, Canberra, located in the *ACT* (*Australian Capital Territory*), between Sydney and Melbourne.

Those are the facts. Here are the feelings: it’s a small country in a big land. With scarcely the population of Southern California, Australia is really one community, spread out over a continent. If a murder occurs in Brisbane, you hear about it 3,000 miles away in Perth. A bad bus crash in Tasmania is common knowledge in Darwin, an election in New South Wales is covered in Western Australia. It’s quaint yet modern, provincial and cosmopolitan, inbred and worldly: a microcosm of western life on a manageable level.

History

Australia is the oldest continent. I can walk out my back door and stand on rocks that were formed over 3 billion years ago. Australia separated from the other continents about 100

million years ago. Animals and plants evolved in isolation, which explains why they're so unique. Most of the land mammals are marsupials, most of the trees are eucalypts. Humans arrived about 40,000–60,000 years ago.

Australia was originally settled by nomadic people migrating from Southeast Asia over a land bridge created during the last major ice age. They came in several waves over tens of thousands of years and spread out over the land. The Australian continent was a wetter, greener place at that time. Besides the present day mix of marsupials, reptiles, and birds, there were *mega-fauna*: huge wombats the size of a hippopotamus, kangaroos ten feet tall and weighing 500 pounds, koalas the size of small bears; all of which were killed off by the early human settlers.

Europeans began exploring the region in the early 1600s; first the Dutch (Australia was originally called *New Holland*), then the French, and finally the British, most notably the great navigator, Captain James Cook. The English eventually claimed and settled the land at about the time of the American Revolution. This wasn't by coincidence, for when the British Empire lost most of its North American colonies (where they'd been exporting their outcasts for two centuries), they needed a new place of exile. Enter Australia: the English version of Devil's Island.

Why did England have such a substantial criminal problem? By the late eighteenth century, the Industrial Revolution was transforming British society from rural agrarian to urban. It brought prosperity, productivity, and employment for skilled laborers, but with it came poverty, unemployment, and crime. Britain had a surplus of criminals, many charged with petty crimes such as stealing food to feed their families. With jails overflowing, the Brits decided to ship these convicts off to a land so far away that most would never return. The system was antiseptically called *Transportation*. In reality, it was a convenient source of free labor to develop a tough, dangerous land on the far side of the Earth. This began an odd love-hate relationship between the Australian colony and the mother country. This relationship continues to this day.

The First Fleet, consisting of eleven ships and more than

750 convicts, landed in New South Wales in 1788 after a five-month sea voyage, and eventually established a colony at Port Jackson in Sydney Cove. While the east coast of Australia was a penal colony, South Australia (first settled in 1836), received no convicts and was always a free colony. Western Australia started as a free colony in 1829, but by 1850 requested convicts to fill a severe manpower shortage.

During the early years, small bands of aboriginals would occasionally raid a farm or attack a lone wagon on the road in an effort to retake their lands. Small skirmishes occurred, but these were local incidents treated as police actions and there was nothing like the U.S. Indian wars.

The British had had great triumphs in settling North America and expected the same in Australia, but where North America was forested and had plenty of rivers and rich soil, Australia had few rivers, the interior was mostly barren desert, and only the coastal areas were inhabitable. The Australian continent was eventually settled, but on a more modest scale. It was a hard land to pioneer, but the strong survived and the tradition of the Aussie *battler* was born: tough, tenacious, resourceful, and sometimes successful.

Agriculture drove the economy in the last half of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries. It's said that Australia rode to prosperity on the sheep's back. Wool and wheat created wealth that enabled the cities to grow.

In the west, remote stations were established to raise sheep. Aboriginals wandered in out of curiosity and stayed for generations to do the bulk of the work. They were, in effect, slave labor, working for food, board, and old clothes. Some of these natives would run off and police would bring them back, often in neck chains.

The Australian culture evolved with English provincialism as a base, combining an inward reverence for the bush and an outward need to be accepted in the eyes of the world.

For years, being a descendant of convict stock was a stigma in Australian society, but recently it has become a point of pride, like Americans claiming lineage from the Revolutionary War. When convict *transportation* ended in 1868, many free immigrants—mostly British—came looking for opportunity.

Though isolated at the far end of the world, Australia prospered and bloomed.

On January 1, 1901, Australia was declared an independent nation, with the blessings of Queen Victoria and the government of Great Britain. Despite this, Australia to this day remains a constitutional monarchy with the Royal Family of England still officially the head of state [more on this in the section on **Government**]. The six Australian colonies became states and were federated, with the Northern Territory, into the *Commonwealth of Australia*. Unlike the U.S., there was no Revolutionary War, and no Civil War. There were also no competing countries on common borders, such as France (the Louisiana Territory), Spain (Mexico), and Britain (Canada). Violent rebellion at the birth of their nation and wars of territorial expansion are outside the Australian experience and explain why feelings of patriotism aren't as strong as they are in the U.S.

Tucked away on the far side of the world, Australia developed in quiet isolation through the first half of the twentieth century, evolving her own culture and language, the latter a colloquial version of English. She participated in the English wars against the Boers in South Africa (1899–1902) and against the Germans and Turks in World War I. Both were far-off adventures, performed under British command. At the start of World War II, she contributed troops to the British North African campaign against the Germans and helped bolster the defense of the British fortress of Singapore—and then came the Japanese war in the Pacific, which changed everything.

At the same time the Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, they attacked Singapore, which the British had built at tremendous expense to protect their Southeast Asian Empire. It turned out the Brits had built the defenses to repulse a frontal sea attack by battleships and amphibious forces, and the Japanese had the cheek to stage a land attack from the rear on bicycles. When Singapore fell, the British Empire died with it, and Australia was left on her own. Against British wishes, Australia withdrew troops from North Africa and retrained them as jungle fighters, because by then the Japanese had

invaded New Guinea, which was an Australian territory, a hundred miles off the north coast.

Meanwhile, the United States was being forced out of the Philippines by the Japanese and needed another base of operations in the South Pacific. Knowing a citadel was harder to defeat than an outpost, Australia welcomed the huge amount of men and material the Yanks sent. The Americans soon discovered that they had as much in common with Australia as they had with Great Britain. During the war years, the U.S. and Australia became close allies politically, socially, and economically—ties that remain strong to this day.

After WWII, improvements in communication and travel allowed Australia to emerge from isolation and to join the world community. Economically, things had also changed. Synthetics were replacing wool as the fiber of choice and the wool industry suffered a depression. About that same time, demand rose for minerals: iron ore, alumina, and precious metals, all of which Australia had in abundance. By the 1960s, Australia's ride to prosperity had shifted from the sheep's back to the ore train. New fortunes were made and Australia led the world in mining and mineral resource technology.

To the rest of the world, Australia merely changed from being a farm to being a quarry, with a few kangaroos and koalas thrown in for charm.

Fiber optic phone lines, the Internet, and satellite TV brought Australia closer to the rest of the world in a virtual sense, but physically it is still a far-off destination—an expensive fourteen-hour flight from the west coast of the U.S. to Sydney—and this has been a detriment to development. But the fact often missed is that being isolated from the rest of the world behind a circle of oceans can be an advantage, both in terms of safety and the need to develop self-reliance. Australia has had to develop her own industries and has been able to keep out disease, terrorism, and illegal immigration. The standard of living is among the highest in the world.

Australia's level of contribution to the world far outweighs her small population. Blessed with sunshine, clean air, abundant natural resources, an optimistic outlook, and distance from most of the world's problems, Australia can truly be

called "The Lucky Country".

Indigenous Australians As for the natives who'd lived on the island-continent for tens of thousands of years before the Europeans arrived, they got the shaft. Regarded as animals, they were hunted, starved, enslaved, killed off by disease, introduced to alcohol and drugs, and had their children taken from them by seemingly well-intentioned, but ultimately cruel and insensitive, welfare laws.

The nineteenth century white man's attitude was that the indigenous Australians would eventually die off or assimilate through a *breeding out the black* plan and cease to be a problem. Aboriginal Australians didn't have Australian citizenship until 1948, had no rights until 1960, couldn't vote until 1967 and weren't protected by anti-discrimination laws until 1975. This was in the land they'd occupied for over 40,000 years.

Like the indigenous American tribes who were stuck with the name "Indian" (commemorating Christopher Columbus' 10,000 mile navigation error), the indigenous Australians were saddled with being *Aborigine*. Aborigine is a Latin term meaning "from the beginning." There were between 300,000 and 500,000 indigenous Australians when English settlement began in 1788. They belonged to as many as 600 tribes, speaking hundreds of languages. Each has—or had—a rich spoken culture and ingenious survival techniques that allowed them to flourish in an environment that regularly killed Europeans who ventured beyond "civilization."

These hardy, tenacious, Aborigines were nearly defenseless as the lands and way of life they'd developed over thousands of generations were taken from them in just a few decades. Many died of European diseases for which they had no immunity. By 1900, 90 percent had been eliminated and the indigenous population had withered to less than 50,000. It truly looked as if they would cease to exist as a people, but the ones that managed to survive developed a resistance to European diseases and soon learned to demand their rights. A hundred years later, by 2001, the population had returned to about 450,000, but this is only about 2½ percent of the total population of Australia, so they have a very small voice.