

AUSTRALIA – OVERVIEW

- Located in the Southern Hemisphere
- The world's smallest continent and largest island
- The only continent which is also a country
- The world's sixth largest country
- **Official name:** the Commonwealth of Australia
- **Capital city:** Canberra
- **Largest city:** Sydney
- **Area:** 7,692,024 km²
- **Population:** over 23 million
- **Official language:** none
- **Most widely used language:** English
- **Number of languages used:** over 200
- **Government:** Federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy:
 - Monarch: Elizabeth II
 - Governor-General
 - Prime Minister
 - Chief Justice
- **Administrative division:** **Victoria** (Melbourne), **New South Wales** (Sydney), **Australian Capital Territory** (Canberra), **Queensland** (Brisbane), **South Australia** (Adelaide), **Western Australia** (Perth), **Northern Territory** (Darwin), **Tasmania** (Hobart)
- **First people:** Aborigines, about 45 000 years ago
- **Started as:** a British penal colony (1788)
- **Independence** from the United Kingdom: 1 January 1901
- **National anthem:** *Advance Australia Fair*

- **National colours:** green and gold
- **National floral emblem:** the golden wattle
- **National gemstone:** opal
- **Currency:** Australian dollar (AUD)
- **Traffic:** left-hand
- **Summer months:** December, January, February
- **Winter months:** June, July, August
- **Nature:**
 - one of the most biologically diverse countries on the planet
 - about 85% of flowering plants, 84% of mammals, more than 45% of birds, and 89% of inshore, freshwater fish are unique to Australia
 - there are more than 140 species of marsupials in Australia

“Australia is the world’s sixth largest country and its largest island. It is the only island that is also a continent, and the only continent that is also a country. It was the first continent conquered from the sea, and the last. It is the only nation that began as a prison.

It is the home of the largest living thing on earth, the Great Barrier Reef, and of the most famous and striking monolith, Ayers Rock (or Uluru to use its now official, more respectful Aboriginal name). It has more things that will kill you than anywhere else. Of the world’s ten most poisonous snakes, all are Australian. Five of its creatures – the funnel-web spider, box jellyfish, blue-ringed octopus, paralysis tick and stonefish – are the most lethal of their type in the world. This is a country where even the fluffiest of caterpillars can lay you out with a toxic nip, where seashells will not just sting you but actually sometimes go for you. Pick up an innocuous coneshell from a Queensland beach, as innocent tourists are all too wont to do, and you will discover that the little fellow inside is not just astoundingly swift and testy, but exceedingly venomous. If you are not stung or pronged to death in some unexpected manner, you may be fatally chomped by sharks or crocodiles, or carried helplessly out to sea by irresistible currents, or left to stagger to an unhappy death in the baking outback. It’s a tough place.”

Bill Bryson, „Down Under”