

## **AUSTRALIA**

### **The Lucky Country**

Australia is called “The Lucky Country” because of its rich natural resources, its varied landscapes and culture and its tolerant multiethnic society. Australia is the smallest continent and at the same time the largest island in the world. It is situated in the Southern Hemisphere, between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans and it includes numerous smaller islands, such as the island of Tasmania in the south-east.

The Australian territory is really unique! It includes subtropical rainforests in the north, deserts and uplands in the center and high mountain ranges in the east. The Great Dividing Range includes the highest peak on the Australian mainland, Mount Kosciuszko. The largest desert is the Great Victoria. The longest river is the Murray river, which begins in the south-eastern Australian Alps and empties into the Indian Ocean. Rich in natural resources, Australia is a major exporter of agricultural products, particularly wheat and wool, minerals such as iron ore and gold, and energy in the forms of liquefied natural gas and coal. The climate in Australia is extremely varied: tropical and subtropical in the north, semi-arid and desert inland and temperate in the south, where most people live.

One of Australia’s most remarkable natural beauties and one of the seven wonders of the natural world, The Great Barrier Reef is the largest coral reef system in the world. It stretches for about 3.000 kilometers in the Coral Sea, off the north-eastern coast of Queensland. It is nicknamed “the Milky Way of the Pacific Ocean” and it is the only living organism on earth visible from space. The Great Barrier Reef took between 50.000 and 100.000 years to form. The Great Barrier Reef is a major tourist destination and a great resource for the Australian economy.

### **Government**

Australia, officially called “Commonwealth of Australia” is a federation of six states derived from the former six British colonies. It is a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy. The Head of State is the reigning British Monarch, Queen Elizabeth II, who is also Queen of Australia. She is represented by a Governor-General. The Australian Parliament consists of two chambers: the House of Representatives or Lower House, which has 150 members and the Senate or Upper House, which has 76 members.

The federal capital is Canberra. The largest and most populated Australian city is Sydney, followed by Melbourne, Brisbane, Perth and Adelaide. More than 22 million people live in Australia. Most of them live along the coastal regions. They are mainly European descent, especially British, Irish, Italian and Greek, some are of Asian ancestry, and about only 2% Aborigines. The majority of people are Christians, followed by Muslims, Buddhists and Jewish people. The currency is the Australian Dollar. Australian does not have an official language, but English is the first language spoken by the vast majority of the population in its variety of Australian English.

## **THE ABORIGINES**

The Aborigines are the indigenous people of Australia who moved from South East Asia more than 40.000 years ago. Different groups spread throughout Australia, preserving their lifestyle, beliefs and rituals from generation to generation. When the Europeans settled in Australia, they mistreated Aboriginal people. They sometimes tried to assimilate Aborigines into white society, but more often they tried to eradicate them. In 1997 the Australian government was accused of genocide. The Human Rights Commission demanded official apologies and financial compensation for the Aborigines. In 1998, on 26<sup>th</sup> of May, the National Sorry Day was declared, the Australian Prime Minister expressed regret for their historical mistreatment. Today Aboriginal people represent about 2% of the population. Most of them live in tribes on government reservations in the north-west of Australia.

### **THE FLAG**

Australia's National Flag, officially recognized in 1953, includes the Southern Cross constellation, which represents Australia itself, the Union Jack and the Commonwealth star to represent its past and present connection with the United Kingdom.