Australia

Location

Australia is a country that is fortunate. It’s fortunate because it has its own continent. The country takes up the whole continent, which leaves no room for another small country to exist. Australia has an area of 2,967,909 sq. miles. This is about the size of the continental United States. The land is arid, which probably explains to why it is the least densely populated of the continents. The country is very fortunate to have a fluent amount of coast line. Twelve thousand, two hundred and ten miles of coast gives a proportion of 1 mile of coast to 244 sq. mile of land surface. The isolation of Australia is one of the main factors of its geography. Being in the Southern Hemisphere, the closest civilization is Asian with 400 miles between them.

Geography

This country is generally flat. It is known for its lack of high mountains, snowfields, and glaciers. The east central depression is made up of an irregular belt of lowlands that stretch towards the south. Moving eastward, the lowlands turn into a small low mountain chain that extends to the coast. In the eastern part of the country, the mountain chain consists of plateaus that level around 2,000 feet above sea level. A depression separates the eastern and western sides. The depression is usually less than 500 feet and reaches from the Gulf of Carpentaria to western Victoria. The Great Artesian basin and Murray-Darling basins are located in the depression and help make
it the largest river system in the continent. West of the Eastern Highlands, the vegetation is predominantly drought resistant. The land to be predominantly flat, and the vegetation is primarily open woodland or savanna.

There are few rivers located in the country. Most rivers only flow in the wet season or only once in several years. The longest river is the Darling, (1702 miles) which has dried up for eighteen months at a time. The Murray (1609 miles), has only dried up on three occasions. Its Australia’s only true river because it mostly carries water from springs and flows through the lowlands.

**Climate**

Australia’s weather is moderate for the whole country. In the Northern part, the temperature stays around 80 F. In Southern part, the temperatures dip down to 50 F. The mountains do receive snow and freezing temperatures. But very rarely does snow fall below 2,000 feet. The eastern coast is generally well watered during all seasons. The inner part or central region somewhat resembles a desert. In the driest areas, the land only receives on average five inches of rainfall per year.

**Important Dates**

The people of Australia have different holidays that relate to their religion. The most popular holiday is known as Australia Day (January 26). This holiday celebrates the first European settlement in Australia. It’s similar to Columbus Day in the USA. Queen’s birthday is celebrated along with holidays for Boxing Day and local holidays for horse racing. The days depend on which area a person is in. The rest of the holidays are traditional as in the USA.
Population

The Australian population tallied around ten million in 1961. But it increased 10% over the next five years. This was the largest jump in history. It’s currently increasing 2.5% annually.

Eastern Australia holds the most people but the majority live in two cities, Sydney and Melbourne. The average density is around 4 persons per square mile, which gives Australia the distinction of being the least densely populated of the continents.

Currency, Education, & Language

These topics are very closely related to the United States of America. The currency started with the British system of pounds, shillings, and pence. In 1964, Australia announced the switch over to dollars and cents, which became effective in 1966. Education is split the same way by having primary and secondary education along with private and public sectors. The state government is primarily responsible for public education. English is taught in all the schools but some immigrants might have their own language.

Trade

Foreign Trade is something that Australia depends heavily on. Imports consist mostly of finished goods and products of industrialization. Exports consist of minerals, wool, meat, and wheat. These products are mostly shipped out as raw products. As population increases, the more trading Australia does.

Australia is currently a member of the World Trade Organization, WTO. The WTO is working with Australia in negotiations to have an open market system for trade. These rules will give Australia open access to Japan for rice and wool. These guidelines are helping the agriculture sector to grow and become more productive.
Food

What do people like to eat? Whatever their taste buds are hungry for. Just like in the U.S., people can get a variety of foods. The majority of people eat with the western style of using silverware. Specialty restaurants are available that serve niche markets. Three traditional meals are served with brunch being the most popular. A spread or jam is used on toast, which is well known. Lunch is lighter and supper is a full course meal. Take-out meals and fast food are abundant.

Agriculture

Australia has a federal department that regulates agriculture, “The Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry”, or more commonly noted as AFFA. The Department has dual roles of providing customer service to industries and addressing the challenges of natural resource management. Another item that deserves to be a role too is the AFFA helps build and promote the agriculture industry for Australia. It completes its task through regulations and trade. The government agency works closely with the WTO to benefit the country.

Little land is suitable for crops. So if crops can be raised on the land, it takes priority over other products. Irrigation has changed some of the land use over the years, but some arid areas just don’t have access to water. Sheep and wool are the most predominant products that come from the agricultural industry. Merino sheep are used in the hot areas to produce fine wool. In the more regular rainfall areas, dual-purpose breeds are used. In southern Australia an emphasis is on fat lambs and mutton production. Field crops consist mostly of cereal grains
because of the dry climate. Beef and dairy cows are in the minority mostly because of the climate and the already established sheep production industry.

**Landmarks**

There are numerous sites to visit and tour while in Australia. Probably the most famous would be the Sydney Opera House. It’s known for its sail-like, shell-like roofs. It also houses theatre, classical music, ballet and film. Bondi Beach is famous for its excellent sandy beaches. If a tourist wants to see old rocks or sediment washing away, Sydney harbor has the scenery. The Outback of Australia, filled with kangaroos and dingos, comes in at the second most famous. It contains red dust, empty tracks, surreal wildlife, endless openness, tall tales and big thirst. A beautiful country readily awaits one’s arrival.

*Mark Baldwin*