Australia and its people

At the citizenship ceremony, you pledge your loyalty to Australia and its people. It is therefore important for you to have an understanding of Australia’s community and population, including our Indigenous heritage. It is also important for you to understand how Australia developed from its uncertain beginnings as a British colony to the stable and successful multicultural nation it is today.

In this section, you will read about some of the events that have contributed to our story. There is information about our states and territories, and there is information on the traditions and symbols that we proudly identify as being distinctively Australian.

Our people

Indigenous Australians

Australia’s first inhabitants were the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They are the Indigenous people of Australia. Australia’s Indigenous cultures are the oldest continuing cultures in the world. Historically, Aboriginal people are from mainland Australia and Tasmania. They have lived here for between 40,000 and 60,000 years.

Torres Strait Islanders are from islands to the north of Queensland. They have a distinct cultural identity. Indigenous people share common beliefs and traditions that still guide them today. They have a deep connection with the land that is expressed in their stories, art and dance.

Early days of European settlement

European settlement started when the first 11 convict ships, which became known as the ‘First Fleet’, arrived from Great Britain on 26 January 1788.

At this time British laws were harsh and the jails could not hold the large number of people imprisoned for their crimes. To manage this problem, the British Government decided to transport these convicts to the new colony of New South Wales.

The first governor of the colony of New South Wales was Captain Arthur Phillip. He overcame many problems in the first few years of European settlement. The colony survived and as more convicts and free settlers arrived, it grew and developed. More colonies were established in other parts of the country.

Part 1
Australia and its people

From this time forward, under God,*

I pledge my loyalty to Australia and its people,

whose democratic beliefs I share,

whose rights and liberties I respect, and

whose laws I will uphold and obey.

* A person may choose whether or not to use the words ‘under God’.
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Early free settlers were from Great Britain and Ireland. This British and Irish heritage has had a major influence on Australia’s history, culture and political institutions.

In 1851, gold was discovered in the colonies of New South Wales and Victoria. People from all around the world came to these colonies to try their luck at making a fortune. Chinese people arriving at this time were the first large group of migrants not from Europe. In 10 years, the population more than doubled.

The nation of Australia

Over the following decades, the separate colonies discussed the idea of becoming one nation.

In 1901, the colonies were united into a federation of states called the Commonwealth of Australia. At that time, Australia’s population was counted at about four million people. This number did not include the Indigenous people.

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, migration levels rose and fell. There were programs to actively encourage British migrants to settle here, and many did.

A wave of non-British migration came after World War II, when millions of people in Europe had to leave their homelands. Large numbers came to Australia to build a new life.

In recent years, our migration and refugee programs have brought people to Australia from all over the world. People have come here to join family, to make a new life in a young country, or to escape poverty, war or persecution.

Today, Australia has a population of about 24 million people. Over one quarter of these people were born overseas. Australia is greatly enriched by the contribution these people make to our nation. While we celebrate the diversity of Australia’s people, we also aim to build a cohesive and unified nation.

Australia’s national language is English. It is part of our national identity. Everyone in Australia is encouraged to learn and use English to help them participate in Australian society. Communicating in English is also important for making the most of living and working in Australia. Other languages are also valued. In Australia’s diverse society, over 200 languages are spoken.
Australia’s states and territories

The Commonwealth of Australia is a federation of states and territories. There are six states and two mainland territories. Canberra is Australia’s capital city, and each state and mainland territory has its own capital.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Capital city</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales (NSW)</td>
<td>Sydney</td>
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<tr>
<td>Victoria (Vic.)</td>
<td>Melbourne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Queensland (Qld)</td>
<td>Brisbane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Australia (WA)</td>
<td>Perth</td>
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<td>South Australia (SA)</td>
<td>Adelaide</td>
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<td>Tasmania (Tas.)</td>
<td>Hobart</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Capital Territory (ACT)</td>
<td>Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Territory (NT)</td>
<td>Darwin</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Canberra is also Australia’s capital city.
The states

New South Wales was the first colony established by the British. Sydney is the capital city of New South Wales and is the nation’s largest city. Sydney’s Harbour Bridge and Opera House are national icons.

Victoria is the smallest of the mainland states. Many fine buildings in Victoria were built from the wealth created by the gold rush of the 1850s. Victoria’s capital city is Melbourne.

Queensland is the second largest state. It has the Torres Strait Islands in the north, tropical rainforests, temperate coastal areas and an often dry inland. The world famous Great Barrier Reef runs along its eastern coast. Queensland’s capital city is Brisbane.

Western Australia is the largest state. The east of the state is mostly desert, while the south-west is a rich agricultural and wine-growing area. The state is home to many large mining projects. About three-quarters of the state’s population lives in Perth, the capital city.

South Australia has a rugged coastline and many famous wine regions. Adelaide, the capital city, has many examples of fine colonial architecture.

Tasmania is the smallest state, separated from the mainland by Bass Strait. Much of the island has unspoilt wilderness landscapes. Tasmania’s capital city is Hobart.

The territories

The Australian Capital Territory is situated between Sydney and Melbourne. It is the site of the nation’s capital city, Canberra. Canberra is home to important national institutions, such as Parliament House and the High Court of Australia.

The Northern Territory has the tropics in the north and red desert soil in the south. Most of its small population live in the capital city, Darwin, and along the main highway between Darwin and Alice Springs, which is the main town near the centre of Australia.
Traditions and symbols
Important days for Australians

Australia Day
On 26 January each year, we celebrate Australia Day. Australia Day is a public holiday in every state and territory in Australia.

On Australia Day, large and small communities across Australia celebrate all that is great about Australia and being Australian. It is the biggest annual public event in Australia.

Australia Day is the day that we honour our history and all the people who have made this nation great. It is a day to rejoice in the present and commit to a happy and prosperous future together. For this reason, it is a day when many citizenship ceremonies are held across the country.

It is the anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet from Great Britain in 1788 to set up a convict settlement for the British Government. The commander of the First Fleet was Captain Arthur Phillip.

On the eve of Australia Day, the Prime Minister announces the Australian of the Year Awards in Canberra.

Anzac Day
Anzac Day is observed on 25 April each year. Anzac Day is named after the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps, which landed at Gallipoli in Turkey during World War I on 25 April 1915.

Anzac Day is a solemn day when we remember the sacrifice of all Australians who served and died in wars, conflicts and peacekeeping operations. We also honour the courage and commitment of all servicemen and women.

More information about Australia Day, Anzac Day and other important national days and celebrations can be found in Part 4, Australia today.
Australia’s flags

The Australian National Flag is the official flag of our nation. Other flags that are officially recognised and may be flown in the community include the Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander Flag.

Each state and territory also has its own flag. These can be found on page 11.

The Australian National Flag

The Australian National Flag is blue, white and red. It has three important parts:

- The flag of the United Kingdom, known as the Union Jack, is in the top left corner. The flag represents our history of British settlement.
- The Commonwealth Star is under the Union Jack. This star has seven points, one point for each of the six states and one for the territories.
- The Southern Cross, on the right, is a group of stars we see in the southern sky.

The Australian Aboriginal Flag

The Australian Aboriginal Flag is black, red and yellow. It has three important parts, and the most common interpretation of the colours is:

- The top half is black and represents the Aboriginal people of Australia.
- The bottom half is red and represents the earth and a spiritual relation to the land.
- The yellow circle represents the sun.

The Torres Strait Islander Flag

The Torres Strait Islander Flag is green, blue, black and white.

- The green stripes represent the land.
- The blue panel in the centre represents the sea.
- The black lines represent the Torres Strait Islander people.
- The white dancer’s headdress in the centre is a symbol for all Torres Strait Islanders.
- The points of the white star represent the island groups in the Torres Strait.
- The colour white is a symbol of peace.
Commonwealth Coat of Arms

The Commonwealth Coat of Arms is the official symbol of the Commonwealth of Australia. It represents our national unity. It identifies the authority and property of the Commonwealth of Australia.

- The shield in the centre represents the six states and federation.
- A kangaroo and an emu support the shield on each side. Kangaroos are native Australian animals and emus are native Australian birds.
- A gold Commonwealth Star sits above the shield.
- The background is the golden wattle, Australia’s national flower.

Australia’s national flower

Australia’s national flower is the golden wattle. This small tree grows mainly in south-eastern Australia. It has bright green leaves and many golden yellow flowers in spring. Each of the states and territories of Australia also has its own floral emblem.

Australia’s national colours

Australia’s national colours are green and gold, the colours of the golden wattle. The uniforms of our national sports teams are usually green and gold.

Australia’s national gemstone

The opal is Australia’s national gemstone. In Aboriginal legend, a rainbow touched the earth and created the colours of the opal.
Australia’s national anthem

‘Advance Australia Fair’ is Australia’s national anthem. It is sung on occasions of national importance. It is also sung at Australian citizenship ceremonies, major sporting events and at school. It unites the nation and is a public expression of the joy and pride in being Australian.

Advance Australia Fair

Australians all let us rejoice,
For we are young and free;
We’ve golden soil and wealth for toil;
Our home is girt by sea;
Our land abounds in nature’s gifts
Of beauty rich and rare;
In history’s page, let every stage
Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

Beneath our radiant Southern Cross
We’ll toil with hearts and hands;
To make this Commonwealth of ours
Renowned of all the lands;
For those who’ve come across the seas
We’ve boundless plains to share;
With courage let us all combine
To Advance Australia Fair.
In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair.

*While you may be tested on Australia’s national anthem, you will not be tested on the words of the anthem.