

## Some Aspects of Australian Culture

### Background

The indigenous Aboriginal people of Australia have been living in this land for at least 45,000 years. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Australia was colonised by Great Britain. It was a collection of British colonies until 1901 when Australia became an independent country. Due to our historical ties to Great Britain, many of our institutions, such as our government, judicial, and educational systems have developed from British models.

### Australia is a multicultural country

Australians come from a variety of backgrounds. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are Indigenous Australians. Many Australians have a British or Irish background. Since the Second World War, many immigrants have come from other European countries; from the 1970s, many more immigrants have come from other parts of the world, especially Asia. Currently, about one third of Australians were born in another country.

Immigration has helped Australia become a prosperous and dynamic country. In their policies, national and state governments of Australia recognise the importance of all the cultures that make up Australian society.

### Egalitarian culture

Australians like to think that their culture is egalitarian. The expression, "to give someone a fair go", is commonly used in Australia to show this attitude of social fairness of treating people equally whatever their social background. However, economic, social, and educational divisions do still exist in Australian society.

### Easygoing attitude

Australians are known for having an easygoing attitude and treating people in an informal manner. Whilst Australians may have an informal way of talking to one another, most would respect other people's privacy. Therefore, Australians may not necessarily talk to you first, as they would not like to intrude. It may be up to you to make the first approach. Australians are reluctant to ask personal questions, or offer advice unless they have been asked.

### Sense of humour

Australians do like to make fun of one another. Although it may sound insulting, it is usually done in good humour and is a sign of friendship and inclusion in the group. A lot of our humour comes from irony, for example, giving people with red hair the nickname 'Blue'. Like other countries, much of our humour comes from poking fun at people who think that they are better than, or have a higher social status than others.

**For further information:**

- Contact the Academic Skills Adviser on your campus
- Visit our web pages on myACU.

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## Life in an Australian home

Currently, many women work outside the home, so the routine in the home may be different to what you are used to. You may notice that men are involved in the domestic routine. It is quite common for men to do some of the cooking, cleaning, and other household tasks.

It is also quite common that children are expected to do chores around the house. Teenagers are often quite independent, in terms of being responsible for their own rooms and doing their own washing, ironing, and preparing their own meals.

## Young people and independence

In general, young people from primary school onwards become more independent as they grow older, so that by the time they are teenagers they seem to act in an independent manner towards their parents and other adults. At 17 or 18 years of age, teenagers can get a driver's licence and will often have part time work.

Many Australians do not expect children to live at home with their parents until they are married. It is common for teenagers and people in their early 20s, whether working or studying, to move out of home into a share household.

## Relationships

There may be a different attitude towards relationships than what is accepted in your home culture. Dating is common among teenagers, as is showing affection in public. However, attitudes towards such behaviour can be individual and can depend on a person's cultural or religious background.

## Social Settings

If you have been invited for dinner, it is common to bring something for the host, for example, a bottle of wine, flowers, or chocolate as a way of saying thank you. If you have been asked to "Bring a plate", this means you are to bring some food to share at the party. Australia is a country where drinking alcohol is legal and socially acceptable from the age of 18. If you have been invited to a party, and you drink alcohol, it is expected that you bring it with you. The phrase 'BYO' is often used on restaurant menus. This means bring your own alcohol. If you are in a bar where someone offers to buy you a drink and you accept, it is expected that you then offer to buy them a drink in return. This is called, 'a shout'. It would be considered rude if you did not make the return offer. There are many Australians who do not drink alcohol and so there will always be non-alcoholic drinks available at parties, bars, and restaurants.

## Work

The normal working day is generally 8 hours and around the working hours of 9.00am to 5.00pm. The average working week is 40 hours. Many services and shops are not open after a certain time on weekdays and on weekends. This is changing, especially in the larger cities of Sydney and Melbourne.