

Australia



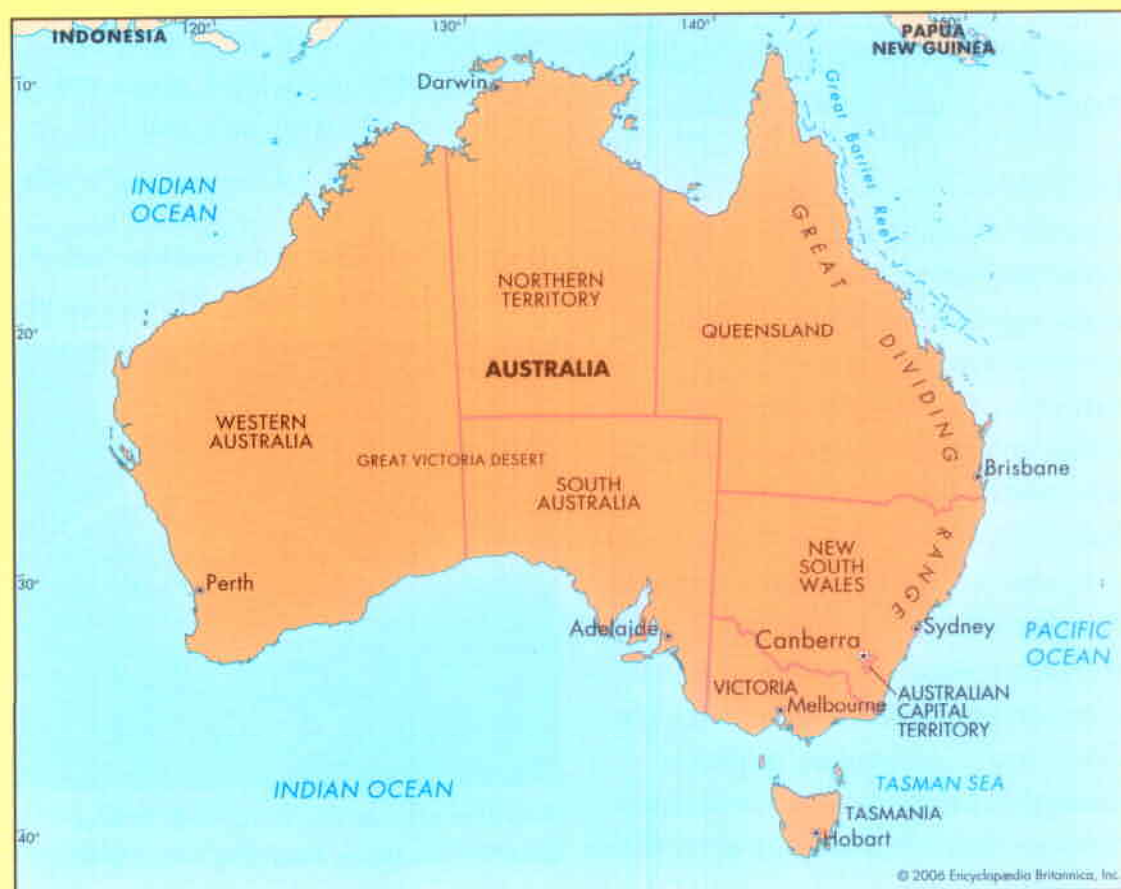
Australia is the only country that takes up a whole continent. It is known for its vast Outback, the Great Barrier Reef, and its unique wildlife. The capital of Australia is Canberra.

Geography

Australia is one of the largest countries in the world, but it is also the smallest continent. Located south of Asia, Australia lies between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean. Off the southeastern coast is the island of Tasmania. It has more than 4,000 lakes. Along Australia's northeastern coast is the world's largest coral reef, the Great Barrier Reef.

The western half of the continent is a plateau with several deserts, including the Great Victoria Desert. East of the plateau is a lowland area that rises to the Great Dividing Range, a range of mountains on the east coast. In the southeast are the Australian Alps. There, Mount Kosciusko, Australia's tallest mountain, stands 7,310 feet (2,228 meters) high. The Darling and Murray rivers also run through the southeast.

Australia is very dry. Most areas have hot summers and mild winters. Because Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere, summer starts in December, and winter starts in June.





Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park is located in Australia's Northern Territory. The area is sacred to Australian Aborigines.

Plants and Animals

Australia's plants vary from region to region. The rain forests of the northeast include flowering plants, palms, and laurels. Woodlands and forests cover eastern Australia. Eucalyptus trees are common in the highlands of the south and at the edges of the deserts. Desert shrubs and grasses grow in dry areas.

The country is home to many unique animals, including emus (large flightless birds), dingoes (wild dogs), and platypuses (egg-laying mammals). Many of the world's marsupials live in Australia—for example, kangaroos, koalas, and wallabies. Crocodiles, lizards, snakes, turtles, and parrots also live there.

People

More than 90 percent of Australians have European roots. Australia welcomed many immigrants, or people from other countries, over the years. However, entry tests were set up to make it very hard for nonwhites to settle there.

This changed in 1973. Since then, many Asians have immigrated to the continent. Aborigines, the native people of Australia, make up a small percentage of the population.

Almost 70 percent of Australians are Christians. There are also small groups of Buddhists and Muslims. Many people do not follow any religion.

Few people live in the central region, called the Outback or "bush." About 85 percent of all Australians live in cities, mostly along the coasts. The official language is English.

Economy

Australia is a prosperous country. Most people work in trade, businesses that serve the public, and manufacturing. Manufacturers make food, print, and metal products; chemicals; and machinery.

Australia's rich natural resources include oil, coal, and natural gas. Mines provide



A bridge crosses the Yarra River in Melbourne. The city is Australia's second largest, after Sydney.