

The economy of Victoria is highly diversified: service sectors including financial and property services, health, education, wholesale, retail, hospitality and manufacturing constitute the majority of employment. Victoria's total gross state product (GSP) is ranked second in Australia, although Victoria is ranked fourth in terms of GSP per capita because of its limited mining activity. Culturally, Melbourne is home to a number of museums, art galleries and theatres and is also described as the "sporting capital of Australia". The Melbourne Cricket Ground is the largest stadium in Australia, and the host of the 1956 Summer Olympics and the 2006 Commonwealth Games. The ground is also considered the "spiritual home" of Australian cricket and Australian rules football, and hosts the grand final of the Australian Football League (AFL) each year, usually drawing crowds of over 95,000 people. Victoria includes eight public universities, with the oldest, the University of Melbourne, having been founded in 1853.

Immigrants arrived from all over the world to search for gold, especially from Ireland and China. Many Chinese miners worked in Victoria, and their legacy is particularly strong in Bendigo and its environs. Although there was some racism directed at them, there was not the level of anti-Chinese violence that was seen at the Lambing Flat riots in New South Wales. However, there was a riot at Buckland Valley near Bright in 1857. Conditions on the gold fields were cramped and unsanitary; an outbreak of typhoid at Buckland Valley in 1854 killed over 1,000 miners.

In November 2006, the Victorian Legislative Council elections were held under a new multi-member proportional representation system. The State of Victoria was divided into eight electorates with each electorate represented by five representatives elected by Single Transferable Vote. The total number of upper house members was reduced from 44 to 40 and their term of office is now the same as the lower house members—four years. Elections for the Victorian Parliament are now fixed and occur in November every four years. Prior to the 2006 election, the Legislative Council consisted of 44 members elected to eight-year terms from 22 two-member electorates.

The centre-left Australian Labor Party (ALP), the centre-right Liberal Party of Australia, the rural-based National Party of Australia, and the environmentalist Australian Greens are Victoria's main political parties. Traditionally, Labor is strongest in Melbourne's working class western and northern suburbs, and the regional cities of Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong. The Liberals' main support lies in Melbourne's more affluent eastern and outer suburbs, and some rural and regional centres. The Nationals are strongest in Victoria's North Western and Eastern rural regional areas. The Greens, who won their first lower house seats in 2014, are strongest in inner Melbourne.

About 61.1% of Victorians describe themselves as Christian. Roman Catholics form the single largest religious group in the state with 26.7% of the Victorian population, followed by Anglicans and members of the Uniting Church. Buddhism is the state's largest non-Christian religion, with 168,637 members as of the most recent census. Victoria is also home of 152,775 Muslims and 45,150 Jews. Hinduism is the fastest growing religion. Around 20% of Victorians claim no religion. Amongst those who declare a religious affiliation, church attendance is low.

Victoria (abbreviated as Vic) is a state in the south-east of Australia. Victoria is Australia's most densely populated state and its second-most populous state overall. Most of its population is concentrated in the area surrounding Port Phillip Bay, which includes the metropolitan area of its capital and largest city, Melbourne, which is Australia's second-largest city. Geographically the smallest state on the Australian mainland, Victoria is bordered by Bass Strait and Tasmania to the south,[note 1] New South Wales to the north, the Tasman Sea to the east, and South Australia to the west.

Prior to European settlement, the area now constituting Victoria was inhabited by a large number of Aboriginal peoples, collectively known as the Koori. With Great Britain having claimed the entire Australian continent east of the 135th meridian east in 1788, Victoria was included in the wider colony of New South Wales. The first settlement in the area occurred in 1803 at Sullivan Bay, and much of

what is now Victoria was included in the Port Phillip District in 1836, an administrative division of New South Wales. Victoria was officially created a separate colony in 1851, and achieved self-government in 1855. The Victorian gold rush in the 1850s and 1860s significantly increased both the population and wealth of the colony, and by the Federation of Australia in 1901, Melbourne had become the largest city and leading financial centre in Australasia. Melbourne also served as capital of Australia until the construction of Canberra in 1927, with the Federal Parliament meeting in Melbourne's Parliament House and all principal offices of the federal government being based in Melbourne.

More than 26,000 square kilometres (10,000 sq mi) of Victorian farmland are sown for grain, mostly in the state's west. More than 50% of this area is sown for wheat, 33% for barley and 7% for oats. A further 6,000 square kilometres (2,300 sq mi) is sown for hay. In 2003–04, Victorian farmers produced more than 3 million tonnes of wheat and 2 million tonnes of barley. Victorian farms produce nearly 90% of Australian pears and third of apples. It is also a leader in stone fruit production. The main vegetable crops include asparagus, broccoli, carrots, potatoes and tomatoes. Last year, 121,200 tonnes of pears and 270,000 tonnes of tomatoes were produced.

Victoria has a written constitution enacted in 1975, but based on the 1855 colonial constitution, passed by the United Kingdom Parliament as the Victoria Constitution Act 1855, which establishes the Parliament as the state's law-making body for matters coming under state responsibility. The Victorian Constitution can be amended by the Parliament of Victoria, except for certain "entrenched" provisions that require either an absolute majority in both houses, a three-fifths majority in both houses, or the approval of the Victorian people in a referendum, depending on the provision.

The Mallee and upper Wimmera are Victoria's warmest regions with hot winds blowing from nearby semi-deserts. Average temperatures exceed 32 °C (90 °F) during summer and 15 °C (59 °F) in winter. Except at cool mountain elevations, the inland monthly temperatures are 2–7 °C (4–13 °F) warmer than around Melbourne (see chart). Victoria's highest maximum temperature since World War II, of 48.8 °C (119.8 °F) was recorded in Hopetoun on 7 February 2009, during the 2009 southeastern Australia heat wave.

Victorian schools are either publicly or privately funded. Public schools, also known as state or government schools, are funded and run directly by the Victoria Department of Education . Students do not pay tuition fees, but some extra costs are levied. Private fee-paying schools include parish schools run by the Roman Catholic Church and independent schools similar to British public schools. Independent schools are usually affiliated with Protestant churches. Victoria also has several private Jewish and Islamic primary and secondary schools. Private schools also receive some public funding. All schools must comply with government-set curriculum standards. In addition, Victoria has four government selective schools, Melbourne High School for boys, MacRobertson Girls' High School for girls, the coeducational schools John Monash Science School, Nossal High School and Suzanne Cory High School, and The Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School. Students at these schools are exclusively admitted on the basis of an academic selective entry test.

Historically, Victoria has been the base for the manufacturing plants of the major car brands Ford, Toyota and Holden; however, closure announcements by all three companies in the 21st century will mean that Australia will no longer be a base for the global car industry, with Toyota's statement in February 2014 outlining a closure year of 2017. Holden's announcement occurred in May 2013, followed by Ford's decision in December of the same year (Ford's Victorian plants—in Broadmeadows and Geelong—will close in October 2016).

Victoria contains many topographically, geologically and climatically diverse areas, ranging from the wet, temperate climate of Gippsland in the southeast to the snow-covered Victorian alpine areas which rise to almost 2,000 m (6,600 ft), with Mount Bogong the highest peak at 1,986 m (6,516 ft). There are extensive semi-arid plains to the west and northwest. There is an extensive series of river systems in

Victoria. Most notable is the Murray River system. Other rivers include: Ovens River, Goulburn River, Patterson River, King River, Campaspe River, Loddon River, Wimmera River, Elgin River, Barwon River, Thomson River, Snowy River, Latrobe River, Yarra River, Maribyrnong River, Mitta River, Hopkins River, Merri River and Kiewa River. The state symbols include the pink heath (state flower), Leadbeater's possum (state animal) and the helmeted honeyeater (state bird).

The Victorian Alps in the northeast are the coldest part of Victoria. The Alps are part of the Great Dividing Range mountain system extending east-west through the centre of Victoria. Average temperatures are less than 9 °C (48 °F) in winter and below 0 °C (32 °F) in the highest parts of the ranges. The state's lowest minimum temperature of −11.7 °C (10.9 °F) was recorded at Omeo on 13 June 1965, and again at Falls Creek on 3 July 1970. Temperature extremes for the state are listed in the table below:

Rail transport in Victoria is provided by several private and public railway operators who operate over government-owned lines. Major operators include: Metro Trains Melbourne which runs an extensive, electrified, passenger system throughout Melbourne and suburbs; V/Line which is now owned by the Victorian Government, operates a concentrated service to major regional centres, as well as long distance services on other lines; Pacific National, CFCL Australia which operate freight services; Great Southern Rail which operates The Overland Melbourne—Adelaide; and NSW TrainLink which operates XPTs Melbourne—Sydney.

Politically, Victoria has 37 seats in the Australian House of Representatives and 12 seats in the Australian Senate. At state level, the Parliament of Victoria consists of the Legislative Assembly (the lower house) and the Legislative Council (the upper house). Victoria is currently governed by the Labor Party, with Daniel Andrews the current Premier. The personal representative of the Queen of Australia in the state is the Governor of Victoria, currently Linda Dessau. Local government is concentrated in 79 municipal districts, including 33 cities, although a number of unincorporated areas still exist, which are administered directly by the state.

On 1 July 1851, writs were issued for the election of the first Victorian Legislative Council, and the absolute independence of Victoria from New South Wales was established proclaiming a new Colony of Victoria. Days later, still in 1851 gold was discovered near Ballarat, and subsequently at Bendigo. Later discoveries occurred at many sites across Victoria. This triggered one of the largest gold rushes the world has ever seen. The colony grew rapidly in both population and economic power. In ten years the population of Victoria increased sevenfold from 76,000 to 540,000. All sorts of gold records were produced including the "richest shallow alluvial goldfield in the world" and the largest gold nugget. Victoria produced in the decade 1851–1860 20 million ounces of gold, one third of the world's output[citation needed].

As of August 2010, Victoria had 1,548 public schools, 489 Catholic schools and 214 independent schools. Just under 540,800 students were enrolled in public schools, and just over 311,800 in private schools. Over 61 per cent of private students attend Catholic schools. More than 462,000 students were enrolled in primary schools and more than 390,000 in secondary schools. Retention rates for the final two years of secondary school were 77 per cent for public school students and 90 per cent for private school students. Victoria has about 63,519 full-time teachers.

Victoria is the centre of dairy farming in Australia. It is home to 60% of Australia's 3 million dairy cattle and produces nearly two-thirds of the nation's milk, almost 6.4 billion litres. The state also has 2.4 million beef cattle, with more than 2.2 million cattle and calves slaughtered each year. In 2003–04, Victorian commercial fishing crews and aquaculture industry produced 11,634 tonnes of seafood valued at nearly A\$109 million. Blacklip abalone is the mainstay of the catch, bringing in A\$46 million, followed by southern rock lobster worth A\$13.7 million. Most abalone and rock lobster is exported to Asia.

There are also several smaller freight operators and numerous tourist railways operating over lines which were once parts of a state-owned system. Victorian lines mainly use the 1,600 mm (5 ft 3 in) broad gauge. However, the interstate trunk routes, as well as a number of branch lines in the west of the state have been converted to 1,435 mm (4 ft 8 1/2 in) standard gauge. Two tourist railways operate over 760 mm (2 ft 6 in) narrow gauge lines, which are the remnants of five formerly government-owned lines which were built in mountainous areas.

After the founding of the colony of New South Wales in 1788, Australia was divided into an eastern half named New South Wales and a western half named New Holland, under the administration of the colonial government in Sydney. The first European settlement in the area later known as Victoria was established in October 1803 under Lieutenant-Governor David Collins at Sullivan Bay on Port Phillip. It consisted of 402 people (5 Government officials, 9 officers of marines, 2 drummers, and 39 privates, 5 soldiers' wives, and a child, 307 convicts, 17 convicts' wives, and 7 children). They had been sent from England in HMS *Calcutta* under the command of Captain Daniel Woodriff, principally out of fear that the French, who had been exploring the area, might establish their own settlement and thereby challenge British rights to the continent.

In 1854 at Ballarat there was an armed rebellion against the government of Victoria by miners protesting against mining taxes (the "Eureka Stockade"). This was crushed by British troops, but the discontents prompted colonial authorities to reform the administration (particularly reducing the hated mining licence fees) and extend the franchise. Within a short time, the Imperial Parliament granted Victoria responsible government with the passage of the Colony of Victoria Act 1855. Some of the leaders of the Eureka rebellion went on to become members of the Victorian Parliament.

The Premier of Victoria is the leader of the political party or coalition with the most seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Premier is the public face of government and, with cabinet, sets the legislative and political agenda. Cabinet consists of representatives elected to either house of parliament. It is responsible for managing areas of government that are not exclusively the Commonwealth's, by the Australian Constitution, such as education, health and law enforcement. The current Premier of Victoria is Daniel Andrews.

During 2003–04, the gross value of Victorian agricultural production increased by 17% to \$8.7 billion. This represented 24% of national agricultural production total gross value. As of 2004, an estimated 32,463 farms occupied around 136,000 square kilometres (52,500 sq mi) of Victorian land. This comprises more than 60% of the state's total land surface. Victorian farms range from small horticultural outfits to large-scale livestock and grain productions. A quarter of farmland is used to grow consumable crops.

Major events also play a big part in tourism in Victoria, particularly cultural tourism and sports tourism. Most of these events are centred on Melbourne, but others occur in regional cities, such as the V8 Supercars and Australian Motorcycle Grand Prix at Phillip Island, the Grand Annual Steeplechase at Warrnambool and the Australian International Airshow at Geelong and numerous local festivals such as the popular Port Fairy Folk Festival, Queenscliff Music Festival, Bells Beach SurfClassic and the Bright Autumn Festival.