Australia, officially the Commonwealth of Australia, is a [sovereign](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sovereign_state) country comprising the mainland of the [Australian continent](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia_(continent)), the island of [Tasmania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tasmania), and numerous [smaller islands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_Australia). With an area of 7,617,930 square kilometres (2,941,300 sq mi), Australia is the largest country by area in [Oceania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oceania) and the world's [sixth-largest country](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_dependencies_by_area).

1. History

[Indigenous Australians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indigenous_Australians) comprise two groups - the [Aboriginal peoples](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aboriginal_Australians) of the Australian mainland (and surrounding islands including Tasmania), and the [Torres Strait Islanders](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torres_Strait_Islanders), who are a distinct [Melanesian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Melanesia) people. Human habitation of the Australian continent is estimated to have begun 50,000 to 65,000 years ago, with the migration of people by land bridges and short sea crossings from what is now Southeast Asia.

The northern coasts and waters of Australia were [visited sporadically](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makassan_contact_with_Australia) for trade by [Makassan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Makassar_people) fishermen from what is now Indonesia. The first recorded European sighting of the Australian mainland, and the first recorded European landfall on the Australian continent, are attributed to the Dutch

in 1783, the British Government sent a fleet of ships, the [First Fleet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Fleet), under the command of Captain [Arthur Phillip](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Phillip), to establish a new [penal colony](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_colony) in New South Wales

The British continued to push into other areas of the continent in the early 19th century, initially along the coast. In 1803, a settlement was established in [Van Diemen's Land](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Van_Diemen%27s_Land) (present-day [Tasmania](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tasmania)),[[80]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australia#cite_note-Davison_pp464-5-85) and in 1813, [Gregory Blaxland](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_Blaxland), [William Lawson](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lawson_(explorer)) and [William Wentworth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wentworth) crossed the [Blue Mountains](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blue_Mountains_(New_South_Wales)) west of Sydney, opening the interior to European settlement

1. Geography and environment

Surrounded by the Indian and Pacific oceans, Australia is separated from Asia by the [Arafura](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arafura_Sea) and [Timor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timor_Sea) seas, with the [Coral Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coral_Sea) lying off the Queensland coast, and the [Tasman Sea](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tasman_Sea) lying between Australia and New Zealand. The world's smallest continent and [sixth largest country by total area](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_and_outlying_territories_by_total_area), Australia—owing to its size and isolation—is often dubbed the "island continent” and is sometimes considered the [world's largest island](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_by_area). Australia has 34,218 km (21,262 mi) of coastline (excluding all offshore islands), and claims an extensive [Exclusive Economic Zone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exclusive_economic_zone) of 8,148,250 square kilometres (3,146,060 sq mi). This exclusive economic zone does not include the [Australian Antarctic Territory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Antarctic_Territory).

Lying on the [Indo-Australian Plate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indo-Australian_Plate), the mainland of Australia is the lowest and most primordial landmass on Earth with a relatively stable geological history. The landmass includes virtually all known rock types and from all geological time periods spanning over 3.8 billion years of the Earth's history. The [Pilbara Craton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pilbara_Craton) is one of only two pristine [Archaean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archean) 3.6–2.7 Ga (billion years ago) crusts identified on the Earth.

1. Climate

The climate of Australia is significantly influenced by ocean currents, including the [Indian Ocean Dipole](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Indian_Ocean_Dipole) and the [El Niño–Southern Oscillation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Ni%C3%B1o%E2%80%93Southern_Oscillation), which is correlated with periodic [drought](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drought_in_Australia), and the seasonal tropical low-pressure system that produces cyclones in northern Australia. These factors cause rainfall to vary markedly from year to year. Much of the northern part of the country has a tropical, predominantly summer-rainfall ([monsoon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monsoon)). The south-west corner of the country has a [Mediterranean climate](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean_climate). The south-east ranges from [oceanic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oceanic_climate) (Tasmania and coastal Victoria) to [humid subtropical](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humid_subtropical) (upper half of New South Wales), with the highlands featuring [alpine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpine_climate) and [subpolar oceanic climates](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Subpolar_oceanic_climate). The interior is [arid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arid) to [semi-arid](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Semi-arid).

1. Biodiversity

Although most of Australia is semi-arid or desert, the continent includes a diverse range of habitats from [alpine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpine_climate) heaths to [tropical rainforests](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tropical_rainforest). Fungi typify that diversity—an estimated 250,000 species—of which only 5% have been described—occur in Australia. Because of the continent's great age, extremely variable weather patterns, and long-term geographic isolation, much of Australia's [biota](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biota_(ecology)) is unique. About 85% of flowering plants, 84% of mammals, more than 45% of [birds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_birds_of_Australia), and 89% of in-shore, temperate-zone fish are [endemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Endemism). Australia has at least 755 species of reptile, more than any other country in the world.