



# Focus on AUSTRALIA School Program

*"Kangaroos, koalas, outback, Great Barrier Reef. That was basically what I thought and knew about Australia about half a year ago. Now, it's Vegemite, Holden and nice people. But what have I actually learnt about Australia since I arrived here? Well, quite some things! They don't have kangaroos in their backyards, the outback looks the same all over Queensland, they always take the car and if you ask how long it will take to get somewhere they tell you it's not far. Then you sit in the car for another four hours!!! But most important: they are the friendliest nation I've ever met. I am having the best year of my life, here down under and that's mainly thanks to the people I now call my family and those who are my friends."*

*Andy, sojourner from Germany, 2003*

Australia is as large as the United States, yet more people live in Texas than in all of Australia. In fact, 90% of Aussies live on 2.6% of the land, typically along the coasts and away from the flat, arid Outback that constitutes much of the continent. Roughly one-fifth of Aussies are first-generation immigrants from 165 different nations, giving Australia probably the world's most diverse populace, and one that's increasingly cosmopolitan and laid-back. At the same time, Australia boasts much that's unique, most notably the Aborigines, whose culture, dating back at least 50,000 years, is the oldest surviving human society, and wildlife such as the kangaroo, koala, platypus and wombat, all of which thrive in the nation's array of 500 national parks that protect mountains, rainforests, deserts, coastal dunes and coral reefs.

## ***AFS & Your Experience***

AFS Australia has been in existence for 50 years. Almost 1,500 AFS volunteers across the country work hard year-round to provide you with the most satisfying intercultural experience possible. During the year, AFS Australia hosts more than 500 students from 34 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your intercultural exchange. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organised AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in your host country, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other chapter volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience abroad.

## ***Landing in Australia***

Your flight will arrive at one of the Multiple Arrival Ports, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Perth. Once the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you will pass through customs and be met by AFS Australia staff and/or volunteers. Because

Australia is a very large country, what happens next depends on your placement. You will then travel to your host community, which may be some distance away.

### **Arrival Orientation**

Four to eight weeks after arrival in your host community, volunteers will stage a regional arrival orientation that will give you a chance to relax, get to know other AFSers in the program and learn about AFS in Australia and Australian culture.

## ***Living in Australia***

### **Lifestyle and Family Living**

Australians are open and straightforward. They are informal and use humour a great deal when they relate to each other. They are family-oriented, and families often do such things together as going to sporting events, to the beach or having a picnic. Everyone shares in the housework. Children are generally independent; although they are expected to respect their parents, they can disagree with them. Most host families are very reluctant to host a student who smokes. Applicants who suffer from allergies should know that virtually all families have pets that spend part of the time indoors.

Australian host families, like AFS host families worldwide, are not paid. They open their homes to students in order to share their community and culture as well as to enrich their own family lives.

Students may be placed in a city, a town or in the country, including Tasmania, the Island State. But most students are hosted in rural or remote areas, not cities.

### **Dress and Appearance**

Australian teenagers follow fashion trends similar to those in western nations and like to dress casually. Jeans, T-shirts, pants, shorts, skirts, tops and blouses, a swimsuit, sneakers and sandals are in order. On special occasions, more formal dress is expected: for girls a dress or blouse and skirt; for boys a dress shirt and slacks. Warm clothing is suitable during the winter months (June-August). Bring a bathrobe, several warm sweaters, a winter jacket, raincoat and boots.

Almost all schools require a uniform and a sports uniform. Costs for these can vary.

### **Diet and Meals**

Australian eating habits can vary among families. All varieties of fish, meat and cheese are common. Fruits and vegetables are available year-round. Take-out and fast food are popular.

### **School**

The curricula and schedules of Australian schools vary from region to region and school to school. The school year generally runs from late January to mid-December, with four terms during the year. Classes start at 8:45 a.m. and run to 3:00 p.m. Required subjects include math, English, history, geography, art, physics and chemistry. Electives may include music, drama, choir and photography. Every effort will be made to place you according to your grade level and academic interests. School attendance is compulsory.

### **Teen Life**

Many Australian teens like dance-techno, rock, hip-hop and pop music. Teens get their driver's licenses at the age of 17, but if they have to go far away they prefer to take a train—cars or buses are a last resort. Teens are not allowed inside nightclubs to buy alcohol or to gamble. It is also against the law for anyone under the age of 18 years old to purchase cigarettes in Australia. Most teens concentrate on pastimes such as spending time on the Internet, going to concerts, house parties and movie theatres. They also enjoy Australian football, soccer, rugby, cricket, basketball, swimming, surfing, tennis, netball, bicycling, hiking and camping.

### **AFS Activities**

On a weekend about four weeks after you arrive, a regional orientation will allow you to catch up with your friendships, share your experiences and ask questions. AFS pays the cost of this orientation.

AFS volunteers may organise several fun activities for you during your stay, including informal get-togethers, weekend outings, picnics and camping trips.

Lastly, there is the so-called End-of-Stay camp. You will get together with other AFSers right before you return home. The End-of-Stay is about looking back at your exchange and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking of the future.

AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet (often for a weekend or for a few days) to talk about expectations for the future program and past experiences. Orientations involve participating in group activities and self-examination. Sessions usually provide new information and ways of looking at things while also allowing participants to share points of view. AFS orientations are social, interactive and educational, bringing together young people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

Some regions offer additional activities to hosted students. Activities vary from region to region and participants will be advised about them upon arrival in Australia. The cost for additional activities varies and is payable by participants with approval required from natural parents.

### **Travel**

Although it is natural for you to want to travel while in Australia, AFS is not designed as a tourist program. AFS offers the rare opportunity to be immersed in a culture and a country. It is likely, however, that you will have many opportunities to travel with your host family, school, community organisation, local group or AFS Australia. We strongly discourage travelling on your own or with friends.

### **Spending Money**

Host families are asked to pay only for ordinary family events in which you are expected to participate. When you do things such as shopping for yourself or going out with friends, the related expenses are your responsibility. You should plan to have AU\$2,000-AU\$3,000 in traveller's cheques for spending money for a semester and AU\$2,500-AU\$4,000 for a year. Note that spending more than your peers and family may create a distance between you and them.

### **Safety and Support**

Australia is a safe country, and you should do well if you follow the normal precautions you would use in your home country.

During your stay, local AFS volunteers will be available to assist you as you learn to live as an Australian. In the event of an emergency, AFS staff can be reached 24 hours a day by you in your host country and by your natural family at home.

For the welfare of participants, AFS Australia has three rules: no driving, no hitchhiking and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any student who violates any of these rules will be automatically sent home.

### **Health Precautions**

In addition to the precautions mentioned above, AFS suggests that you discuss the health recommendations for Australia (which you can get from your government or easily find on the Internet) with your personal doctor, to determine what is best for you and your personal needs.

If you require any medical assistance during your stay, your host family or local volunteers will be ready to help find it. As an AFS participant your medical expenses are covered for illness or injuries incurred while on the program, exclusive of pre-existing, dental or visual aid expenses.

### **Documents**

You must have a passport that will be valid for six months longer than your intended stay. In addition to your passport, you also need a visa to enter and reside in your host country. Visas are obtained through the consular offices of your host country, and requirements often vary from consulate to consulate.

Consulates charge fees for their services, and obtaining your visa can be a complicated and lengthy process requiring a great deal of paperwork, patience and persistence. AFS will help you obtain the visa and provide you with instructions regarding the required documents.

### **Program Prices**

Please [contact the AFS office in your home country](#) for information about program price and scholarship possibilities and what the program price covers for the various program offerings. In most cases the program price covers the following: round-trip international travel with your AFS group; travel in the host country to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host; orientation in your home country and your host country; 24 hour emergency assistance in your home and host countries; a global medical assistance organisation to support extreme emergencies; a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilises a network of volunteers and staff in 50+ countries around the world. Volunteers need training, support and assistance from professional staff in each country. Other expenses you will normally need to pay in addition to the program price: passport and visa fees, required inoculations, expenses for eyeglasses, contacts and dental care, school uniforms (where

applicable) and personal spending money. Your housing and food are provided by your host family as part of their commitment to our program.

## ***Country Information***

### **Geography and Climate**

Australia is the world's smallest continent and the sixth largest country in the world. Australia separates the Indian Ocean from the Pacific Ocean. It is 4,000 km from east to west and 3,200 km from north to south. The coastline is 25,735 km all the way around. It is the planet's oldest continent, with little geological activity across its area for more than four billion years. The single substantial mountain range is the Great Dividing Range running down the eastern (Pacific) seaboard.

In the vicinity of the dividing range are lush tropical rainforests and rich farmlands. Toward the north lie waterways full of life. 65% of Australia is constituted by desert.

Australia's wide variety of weather environments range from deserts to rainforests, from tropical beaches to snowfields. In winter (June-August), typical daily maximum temperatures can be from 15-24°C (68-75°F), and rain is rare. Tasmania and Victoria are often colder.

In summer (December-February), the northern states are hotter and wetter, while the southern states are simply hotter, with temperatures up to 41°C (105°F) in Sydney, Adelaide, and Melbourne but generally between 25-33°C (78-90°F). Snow is rare.

### **Population**

The population numbers about 20 million. Australian society is multicultural, and about one-quarter of the population is foreign-born. Aborigines make up about 1.5% of the population. Australia is a highly urbanised society; about 70% of the population lives in or near the 10 largest cities.

### **Language**

English is the official language of Australia.

### **Government**

Australia is a federal parliamentary state. The Head of State, Queen Elizabeth II of Great Britain, is represented by a governor general. The Head of Government is the prime minister, leader of the party or coalition of parties holding a majority in the federal parliament. There are two houses in the federal parliament: the House of Representatives (lower house) and the Senate (upper house).

### **Religion**

Seventy-six percent of Australians are Christians.

## ***Launching Your AFS Experience***

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those students who prepare prior to leaving have the best experience. In order to get ready, first make every effort to learn some key English words and phrases so that you arrive with at least some basic knowledge of the language.

To further familiarise yourself with life in Australia, make use of your local library and/or the Internet. A lot of general information is available about Australia and its culture.

Although each participant's experience is unique, we strongly suggest that you speak with a recent AFS participant to Australia. This person will be an excellent resource regarding living life as an Australian. If you don't know any alumni, please contact your local volunteer or national AFS office. In addition, AFS Australia will provide you with a special packet of country-specific information.

Australian people will be curious about your home community. You may be surprised to find out how much they already know about your country. Therefore, it is also helpful to be as informed as possible about current events in your community and country.

If you have not already received a full AFS application packet, please contact your local AFS volunteer or national office to request one. We wish you a wonderful experience!

### Curiously Australian

- The koala gets its name from an ancient Aboriginal word meaning "no drink" because it receives over 90% of its hydration from eating eucalyptus leaves.
- The first Europeans to see a kangaroo were Captain Cook, the British explorer, and his sailors.
- When Captain Cook saw the kangaroos, he asked the Aborigines what kind of animals they were and they answered "kangaroo." In their language, that meant, "I don't understand."

### How to Apply

To become a participant in this country's School Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

Student age (upon arrival)	15y to 18y	
Country data	Size	7,686,850 km <sup>2</sup> (2,967,892 mi <sup>2</sup> )
	Population	20 million
	Official Language	English
	Government	Federal parliamentary state
Currency	Australian dollar, divided into 100 cents	
Useful website	<a href="http://www.australia.com/">www.australia.com/</a>	
AFS Australia	<a href="http://www.afs.org.au">www.afs.org.au</a>	

AFS program destinations are not always available to residents of all countries. If a program interests you, please contact your nearest AFS office to find out if it is an option for you. You can locate your nearest AFS office at <http://www.afs.org/contact>