

# Focus on AUSTRALIA



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## Focus on AUSTRALIA Community Service 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...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. 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.

### **Community Service Programs**

AFS's Community Service program gives you the opportunity to share in and contribute to the life of a community in Australia by living and working alongside its members in a community-based service organization. At the organization, you will be asked to pitch in and offer assistance in whatever capacity might be needed and to share the knowledge and experience you have gained from your home culture in the process. No one expects you to be an expert with all the answers to local problems or the ability to change local conditions. Rather, you are expected to be a willing participant in a process of mutual discovery. This experience will present you with innumerable learning opportunities both personally and professionally.

Past Community Service participants in Australia have been involved in environmental/wildlife conservation projects in national parks and forests working with local guides; assisted at horse-riding schools for children with disabilities and helped out at a zoo/aquarium feeding and caring for native and non-native animals. However, all specifics—including assignments, orientations, logistics and activities—vary depending on the program cycle.

# Focus on AUSTRALIA

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

AFS Australia has been in existence for nearly 50 years. Over 1,000 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 participants from 34 countries.

AFS will be at your side throughout your Community Service Program. Even before leaving your home country, you will participate in organized AFS orientations and have the assistance of experienced AFS volunteers. Once in Australia, you can rely on your local volunteer contact and other local group volunteers to support you in your experience. Together we will ensure that you have an incredible experience.

## ***Landing in Australia***

Your flight will arrive in Sydney, Australia's largest city. Once the plane lands and you collect your baggage, you will pass through customs and be met by AFS Australia staff and volunteers. Because Australia is a very large country, what happens next depends on your placement.

### **Initial Orientation**

When you arrive in Sydney you will participate in an initial orientation that will give you a chance to meet the other Community Service participants in the program, discuss any questions you may have regarding your volunteer work placement, as well as have a brief introduction into Australian culture. You will also have some time to visit the sights of Sydney.

### **Arrival Orientation**

Once you arrive in your host community volunteers may organize social events that will give you a chance to relax, get to know other AFSers in your area as well as learn more about AFS in Australia and Australian culture.

## ***Living in Australia***

### **Lifestyle and Family Living**

Australians are generally very open and straightforward. They are informal and use humor a great deal when they relate to each other. Although many families lead busy lifestyles, they are still family-oriented and often do things together such as going to sporting events, to the beach, to BBQs or out to dinner. Everyone is expected to share in the housework and children are normally very independent. Nearly 95% of host families request a participant who does not smoke. Applicants who suffer from allergies should know that many families who have pets often have their animals indoors.

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

# Focus on AUSTRALIA

You may be placed in a city, in a town or in the country, including Tasmania, the Island State.

## **Dress and Appearance**

Although Australians tend to dress casually, depending on where in Australia they live (in the bigger cities people tend to dress more formally) as well as where they work, dress and fashion can vary. You will be notified before you leave about your work placement and if there are any special clothing requirements. Despite the fact that some parts of Australia enjoy pleasant temperatures year round, warm clothing is necessary during the winter months (June-August), especially if you are in southern Australia. Check out [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) for more information about the weather where you will be living.

## **Diet and Meals**

Australian eating habits vary among families and regions. As Australia is made up of many different cultures and backgrounds, you can find dishes from across the globe. All varieties of fish, meat and cheese are common and there is a huge range of fresh fruit and vegetables available year-round. Take-out and fast food are also popular.

## **AFS Activities**

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

At the end of your program you will have an end-of-stay orientation. You will get together with other Community Service participants right before you return home in Sydney. The end-of-stay is about looking back at your time in Australia and sharing memories with other AFSers. It is also about thinking for the future.

AFS orientations are a chance for participants to meet 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 people from many countries and helping them to better understand their own intercultural learning experiences.

Some regions may also offer additional activities. Activities vary from local area to local area and you will be advised about them upon arrival in Australia. Additional activities incur an additional cost.

## **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, community organization, local AFS group or AFS Australia.

# Focus on AUSTRALIA

## **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 approximately AU \$80 a week for spending money.

## **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 worldwide has two rules: no driving and no use of drugs for non-medicinal purposes. Any participant who violates either 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**

Australian law requires you to 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 Australia. This visa is called a Subclass 416 (Special Programs) visa. Sending partners will receive a letter from AFS Australia confirming participation on an AFS Community Service program for a specified period. This letter is required for the visa to be approved. For more information please visit: [www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/147.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/allforms/pdf/147.pdf)).

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; domestic travel in Australia to your host family; travel from your host family to your international departure point; AFS's medical plan; placement with your host family; orientation in your home country and in Australia; 24 hour

# Focus on AUSTRALIA

emergency assistance in your home country and Australia; a global medical assistance organization to support extreme emergencies; and a network of trained volunteers who support you throughout your experience.

In order to keep costs low and provide good service, AFS utilizes 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 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 much colder.

In summer (December-March), 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 is about 20 million. Australian society is multicultural, and about one-quarter of the population was born overseas. Aborigines make up about 1.5% of the population. Australia is a highly urbanized 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

# Focus on AUSTRALIA

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. Of this seventy-six percent, twenty-seven percent are Catholic, twenty-two percent are Anglican and twenty-one percent are affiliated with another Christian denomination. Other prominent religions include Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Judaism.

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

Evaluations by previous participants support our belief that those 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. Without a basic knowledge of English you may find it very difficult to understand what is required of you in your work placement.

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 booklet 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, 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.
- Despite what many people believe, Sydney is *not* the capital of Australia. Canberra was made the capital of Australia in 1901 when Australia became a federation
- Australia has over 60,000kms of coastline
- When Capitan 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 Australia's Community Service Program, contact your nearest AFS office. To locate an AFS office, go to <http://www.afs.org/contact>

# Focus on AUSTRALIA



Participant age (upon arrival)	18-50	
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>

# Focus on AUSTRALIA

