

A Brief History of Australia

Approximately, in the year 40,000 B.C. the first natives arrived in Australia from South East Asia. By 20,000 B.C. they had spread throughout the mainland of the island and across to Tasmania. The name given to these indigenous peoples is Aborigines. When James Cook first encountered these hunter-gatherers, he described them in his log with envy.

“They live in a Tranquility which is not disturbed by the Inequality of Conditions: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary in life, they covet (desire) not Magnificent houses, Household-stuff....In short they seemed to set no value upon any thing we gave them....They think themselves provided with all the necessarys of Life.”

[Robert W. Strayer, Ways of the World, A Global History, citing J.C. Beaglehole, The Journals of Captain James Cook (Cambridge, Hakluyt society, 1968), 1:399].



Aborigine with a boomerang



Aborigine playing a Didgeridoo

When the first Aborigines came to the continent of Australia the estimates are that there were only a few hundred thousand. Most of them lived in the “outback” or bush lands that cover the majority of the internal landmass of the island.

A Chronological History of Australia

Years	Events
1788	British navy Captain Arthur Philip builds a penal settlement at the town of Sydney. He arrived with a fleet of eleven vessels, carrying nearly 800 convicts.
1829	Captain James Sterling of Britain establishes the city of Perth in the colony of Western Australia.
1836	South Australia is established, with Adelaide as its capital
1850s	Gold is found in several locations in Australia. A gold-rush follows for the next ten years. The population of Australia increases three-fold in ten years, passing the million mark. An influx of Chinese mine workers leads to restrictions on their entry. During this time period, the Aborigines are treated very badly and their population diminishes.
1856	Australia becomes the first country to introduce the secret ballot or “Australian Ballot” for elections
1877	Australia and England play the first-ever cricket Test Match in Melbourne.
1901	The country is unified. The British Commonwealth of Australia comes into being on January 1 st . In the same year, the Immigration Restriction Act stops all non-white immigration into Australia
1911	Canberra is founded, built and designated as the capital of Australia



The Australian Outback



Australian Kangaroo



Kookaburra birds



Koala Bear

During the Gold Rush of the 1850s, it was estimated that the population of Aborigines went as low as 60,000 as the lands that they called home were interrupted by miners seeking their fortune. In many cases, these natives were killed because they stood in the way of wealth and ownership of land, two concepts that the Aborigines did not understand. Today, 99% of the population of Australia are still of European or Asian descent.

Population as of 2007: 20.7 million
Area: 7.7 million sq. km. [2.9 million square miles]
Main Exports: Ores and metals, wool, food and live animals, fuels, transport machinery and equipment.

Map of Modern Day Australia



Flag of Australia