

IDENTITIES ABROAD: AUSTRALIA*



IDENTITIES ABROAD

As you prepare for your education abroad program, you may be considering how your own identities may or may not interact with the host culture in similar or different ways than they do at home. Below you will find country-specific information on potential challenges for students who are from backgrounds traditionally underrepresented in education abroad programs. This information, adapted from the Diversity Network's Country Diversity Notes (via [Diversity Abroad](#)), is intended to assist you in exploring how you might be received abroad based on your race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, religion, or ability.

The information below features a country overview for Australia as well as information pertinent to the socio-cultural climate that U.S. students of diverse backgrounds can reasonably expect while living in the country. It also offers bulleted information noting facts that may directly relate to student experiences in the country. Links with additional information resources on the various topics are also offered.

The below information provides a bird's-eye view of diversity matters in the country as they pertain to U.S. students. OGE understands the below information is not exhaustive or inclusive of all possible student identities and experiences. We encourage you to conduct further research and chat with relevant points of contact including your program advisor, faculty leader, or peers who have traveled to the Australia, to gain a greater understanding of your host country and/or city.

If you would like to speak with us about any questions pertaining to diversity and inclusivity abroad, please contact us at study.abroad@purchase.edu and we will answer your inquiry to the best of our ability and/or refer you to others with the expertise that you need. Additionally, if you are interested in discussing other geographical locations, please don't hesitate to contact us.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

FAST FACTS:

Capital: Canberra

Population: 25,466,459 (July 2020 est.)

Language(s): English 72.7%, Mandarin 2.5%, Arabic 1.4%, Cantonese 1.2%, Vietnamese 1.2%, Italian 1.2%, Greek 1%, other 14.8%, unspecified 6.5% (2016 est.)

Religions: Protestant 23.1%, Roman Catholic 22.6%, other Christian 4.2%, Muslim 2.6%, Buddhist 2.4%, Orthodox 2.3%, Hindu 1.9%, other 1.3%, none 30.1%, unspecified 9.6% (2016 est.)

Ethnic groups: English 25.9%, Australian 25.4%, Irish 7.5%, Scottish 6.4%, Italian 3.3%, German 3.2%, Chinese 3.1%, Indian 1.4%, Greek 1.4%, Dutch 1.2%, other 15.8% (includes Australian aboriginal .5%), unspecified 5.4% (2011 est.)

note: data represent self-identified ancestry, over a third of respondents reported two ancestries



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Australia is the eighth most popular destination for U.S. study abroad students. The size of the continental U.S. but with the population of Texas, Australia is one of the largest yet least population-dense countries in the world. Most of Australia's cities straddle the country's coast, leaving the barren outback for excursion. U.S. students are attracted to study abroad in Australia for a variety of reasons. In addition to the sun and beaches, Australia is home to universities that are well-regarded internationally, especially with respect to marine biology, the history and anthropology of Oceanic peoples, and environmental studies. In addition, the similarity in language and culture between the U.S. and Australia reduce some of the challenges that can be part of study abroad experiences in other destinations.

Although Australia exists on the opposite side of the globe from the U.S., and has its distinct tastes, views, and perspectives, the two countries are more alike than they are different. The two countries' common colonial heritage means that U.S. students who study abroad in Australia generally encounter a place that, in many ways, is remarkably similar to the country from which they departed. The countries are both developed, English-speaking Western nations, with a high standard of living and sets of human rights. However, as with their home country, the possibility exists that U.S. students may also encounter discrimination based on race, gender, sexuality, or other markers of difference.

Recognized as a [World Bank High-Income Country](#), the average [Numbeo Cost of Living in Australia](#) is 5% higher than the United States (aggregate data for all cities, rent is not considered). If you plan on renting, expect monthly costs for a single person 14% lower than in the United States.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Review current travel risks for Australia:

- [U.S Department of State Travel Risks](#)
- [Safe Travel to Australia](#)

According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) [Open Doors Report 2019](#), 10,332 students from the United States studied abroad to Australia.

ETHNIC MINORITIES IN AUSTRALIA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS OF COLOR:

With the country originating as a penal colony for England beginning in the late 18th century, Australia originated as and has continued to be a majority-white country. However, it also is home to Asian populations and smaller indigenous (Aboriginal) and European populations. While Australia has a reputation as a modern, developed country, its reputation is occasionally marred, albeit infrequently, by race-based flare-ups which have taken place in several of its large cities over the past decade.

Australia considers itself a diverse, multicultural society. However, this was not always the case. Settlement in Australia officially began in 1788 as a British colony of six confederated states. From then until the formation of the commonwealth in 1900, there was no national immigration policy. However, with increasing competition from Chinese immigrants over goldfields in Victoria and New South Wales, a whites-only immigration policy ensued. That immigration policy only began to be dismantled following the conclusion of World War II. It was not fully dismantled until 1973.

As a result of this discriminatory immigration policy, Australian citizens are predominantly of European descent. Chinese, Samoan, and Indian communities are one thirteenth of the population; Aborigines comprise only one percent. Despite Australia's Eurocentric national identity, most U.S. students report that bigoted or prejudicial attitudes, beliefs, or comments are rare and not commonly experienced, or at least exposed.

U.S. students of Asian descent considering studying abroad in Australia should be aware that there have been reports of targeted assaults on Indian and to an even smaller extent, Chinese students studying abroad in Australia – the two largest groups of foreign students in the country. Although some of these assaults were said to be opportunistic in nature, others appeared to be racially motivated.

NOTES:

- Students of color should carry a copy of identification (or information confirming your purpose in the country) to show authorities in the event of being racially profiled.
- Asian students, particularly those of Indian and Middle Eastern descent, should be aware of the ethnic tensions that may exist in parts of Australia, particularly New South Wales.
- Students not of European descent may have difficulty finding certain beauty products found in the United States.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- World Directory of Indigenous People-Australia, [Minority Rights Group International](#)
- [What Does It Mean to be an Australian](#) Writer & Artist, Mabel Kwon, Asian Australian? Multiculturalism Blog
- [Australians Unlawful Refugee Policy](#), Human Rights Watch
- [Being Black In Australia: My Experience In Sydney](#), Melanin Travel
- [Latin Stories Australia](#)

SEXUAL ORIENTATION IN AUSTRALIA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER OR QUEER STUDENTS:

Homosexuality is legal in Australia and anti-discrimination laws extend to gays and lesbians. Same-sex marriage in Australia has been legal since December 2017. Gay lifestyles are generally accepted in Australia. However, Australia's conservative British/Christian background has meant that the country has been relatively slow to adopt same-sex protections as compared to more progressive nations. Blatant homophobia, harassment or violence against gays was once fairly common, but as with most other western countries the situation has improved considerably over the previous two decades. Most levels of government in most states now actively act against discrimination based on sexual orientation to at least some extent. Violence and discrimination are not unknown however, and opposition from the extreme religious and political/social fringes is still common even to such broadly popular gay events as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras.

NOTES:

- Anti-homosexual violence and discrimination are not unknown in Australia.
- Despite the fairly high level of tolerance or acceptance, many gays are still closeted because of family attitudes or for religious reasons, or for fear of discrimination at work or in their community. However, Australian academe is more progressive and U.S. LGBT students are unlikely to face repercussions for their sexuality.
- The anonymity of the bigger cities makes life easier for gays and lesbians in Australia, while acceptance and support for gays outside those cities lags.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [LGBT Rights in Australia](#), Equaldex
- [LGBT Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [A Message From the Intersex Community](#), The Australian National LGBTI Alliance
- [The Star-Observer Online](#) (premier Australian gay periodical)
- [Murdoch Queer Collective](#)

DISABILITY IN AUSTRALIA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH PHYSICAL DISABILITIES:

The governmental law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in several sectors including education, employment, access, and accommodations. The government not only provides programmatic services and increased access to information for those with disabilities but also effectively enforces applicable laws. Australia's universities generally have the infrastructure to accommodate

students with disability services and disabled-specific facilities at similar levels to U.S. institutions. However, the degree to which this is the case will vary by the study abroad program and host institution the student chooses.

NOTES:

- Specific accommodations should be discussed in detail with program providers prior to choosing a program.
- Outside of Australia's cities, the level of accommodations available to the disabled are greatly diminished.
- Australia does not quarantine cats and dogs that meet the certain requirements from approved countries ([Pet Travel](#)). All requirements also apply to service and emotional support animals. There will be 10 days of quarantine imposed on your pet when entering Australia.
- Excellent medical care is available in Australia. However, regulations regarding medications are different than those in the United States and thus it is recommended by the [U.S. Dept. of State Bureau of Consular Affairs](#) that travelers carry prescription medication in original packaging, along with a doctor's prescription.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Mobility International USA](#), Resources for Americans Traveling Abroad with Disabilities
- [Information for Students with Disabilities Traveling Abroad](#), U.S. Department of State (see section under Local Laws & Special Circumstances)
- [Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016](#), (see Persons with Disabilities).
- [Into Unknown Territory](#), A student's experience in Australia with a visual impairment

RELIGION IN AUSTRALIA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RELIGIOUS STUDENTS:

Although there is no official religion, Australia is generally described as a Christian country. Australia is a mostly Protestant country, with religious observance declining at similar rates to other advanced industrialized countries. The constitution bars the federal government from making any law that imposes a state religion or religious observance, prohibits the free exercise of religion, or establishes a religious test for a federal public office. Extensive immigration has made Australia one of the most religiously diverse societies in the world. Almost all faiths are represented, with significant numbers of Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, and Hindus.

NOTES:

- Discrimination based on religion is rare; freedom and tolerance of various religions is widely accepted and practiced.
- Non-Christian U.S. students are likely to find a lack of congregations outside Australia's major cities. However, Sydney, Melbourne, and Perth do have Jewish, Buddhist, and Muslim communities, where students will find attendant houses of worship.
- Both verbal and physical abuse has been reported among Muslims and Jews.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Countries and Their Cultures: Australia](#) (see section on Religion and Expressive Culture), Every Culture
- [Faith-Based Travel Information](#), U.S. Passports & International Travel
- [Christianity Today Australia](#)
- [Australia Buddhist Directory](#)
- [The Australian Jewish News](#)
- [United Muslims of Australia](#)

WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA

POTENTIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE STUDENTS:

Australia was one of the first countries to grant women suffrage, doing so in 1895. Although the battle against sexist male chauvinism had to be fought there as elsewhere, women in Australia today enjoy the same legal status and rights as men.

Additionally, many women are prevalent in varying levels of government, commerce, and academia. Nevertheless, according to the government, approximately one in three women experienced physical violence, and nearly one in five experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 years.

NOTES:

- Australia ranked number 44th (out of 153 countries) in the [2020 Global Gender Gap Index: Australia](#) conducted by the World Economic Forum.
- Since women travelers have been more likely to be targets of high-risk crimes, it is recommended that travelers are vigilant of their surroundings and make a conscious effort to travel in groups as often as possible.
- The law criminalizes rape, including spousal rape, and prohibits sexual harassment and provides civil penalties.
- Female students who travel to Australia can expect a level of protection and respect equivalent to the U.S.
- In addition to its natural beauty, Australia is generally [a safe and women-friendly country](#). [One Solo Traveler](#) to Australia thinks it's so safe that she claims it's her go to destination when traveling alone.

ADDITIONAL LINKS:

- [Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2016](#), (see Section 6 subheading for Women) U.S. Department of State.
- [Sexual Harassment and Prevention In College Students Studying Abroad](#)

REFERENCES

Maps, flag, and country facts are from the [CIA World Factbook](#). Accessed online in July 2020
[IIE Open Doors Report](#) | [Lonely Planet Australia](#)

Please note: The content within the resources provided were last reviewed in July 2020 and as such could have changed. Views expressed in links provided or in sub-links within the document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Purchase Office for Global Education.