



## **Part 5                    Social and Cultural – Understanding Australian Culture**

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## **Adjusting to Life in Australia:**

While living and studying abroad may be an exciting adventure, it can also present a range of challenges. Having decided to study and live in Australia you will be undertaking adjustments in many areas of your life including cultural, social and academic. It is also important to remember that while these changes are occurring you will be embarking upon a new semester of study (for many of you in a different language) and be away from your usual supports, networks and resources. Adjustment to a new country and culture is a process that occurs gradually and takes time. The values, beliefs, traditions and customs of your home country may vary greatly from those in Australia and adapting to the Australian way of life may take some time. This advice may help:

### **➤ □ Listen, observe and ask questions**

Adjustment to a new culture and way of life takes time. Allow yourself time to observe those around you and patterns of both verbal and non-verbal communication. Don't be afraid to ask questions if there are things you do not understand as this will reduce the chance of confusion or misunderstandings.

### **➤ Become involved**

Make an effort to meet people and become involved in groups both on campus and in the wider community. Maintain an attitude of openness to new situations and experiences. Establishing friendships and joining groups is the best way to experience and learn about Australian culture and will certainly mean you have a richer and more enjoyable time here.

### **➤ Try to maintain a sense of perspective**

When confronted with difficulties remind yourself that living and studying abroad is a challenge and it is normal to feel stressed, overwhelmed and out of your depth at times. Try to recall or make a list of the reasons you initially wanted to study abroad in the first place. Also, listing positive events or changes within yourself that have occurred since you arrived may also assist with getting things in perspective.

### **➤ Maintain some of the routines and rituals you may have had in □ your home country.**

This can include small things such as continuing to drink a certain type of coffee or tea or eating specific foods. It may also include maintaining involvement in bigger events such as celebrating a national day in your country of origin with a group of friends.

### **➤ Keep lines of communication open with those at home.**

Communicating with those at home regularly about your experiences of study and life in Australia, through emails, telephones and letters, is vital. Not only does it help to keep you connected with important social supports, it also assists your friends and family to understand your experiences which will smooth the transition when you return home.

### **➤ Sense of humour**

Importantly, remember that living in a different culture means you will inevitably find yourself in a range of unusual and often confusing situations. Being able to laugh in these situations will remind you that it takes time to understand different cultures and that it is ok to make mistakes.

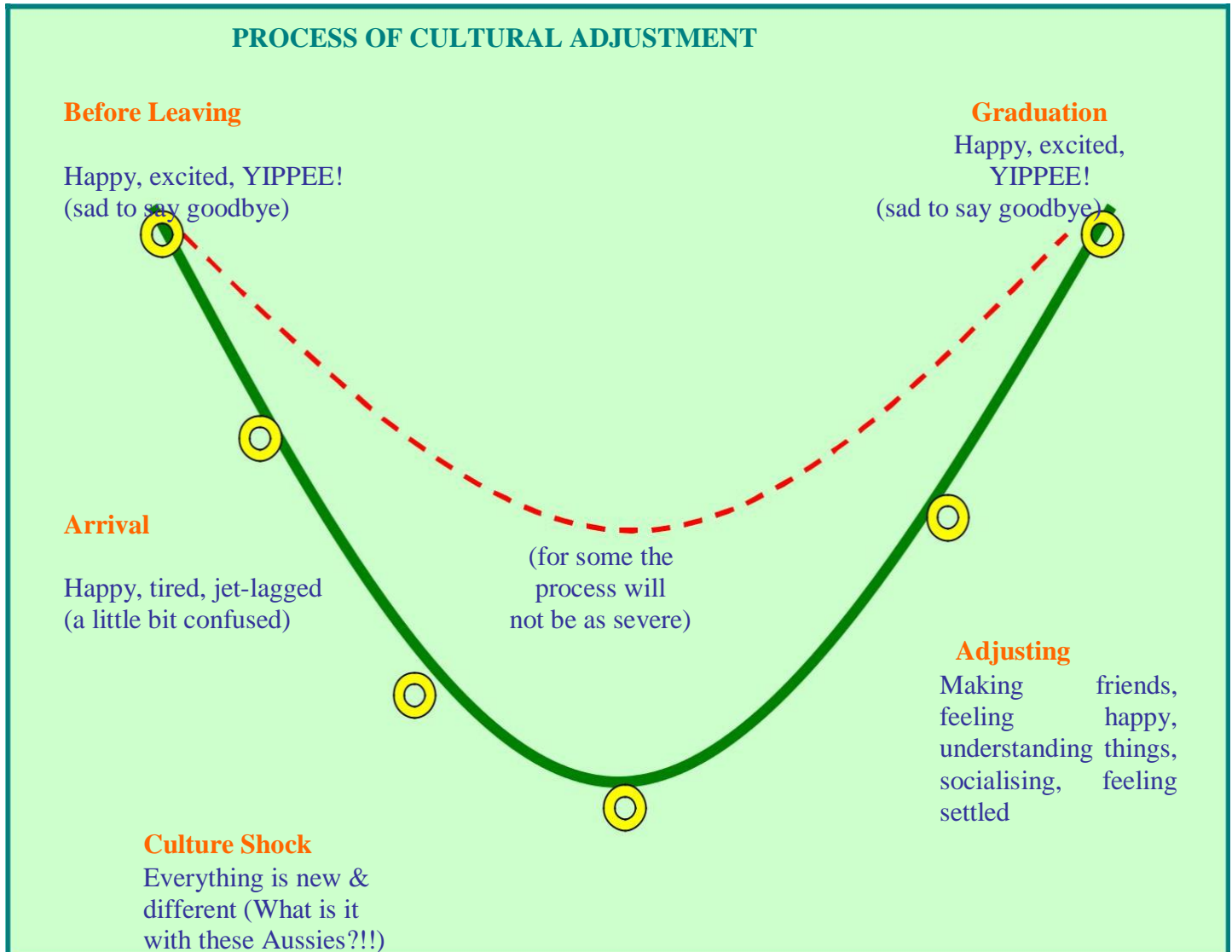
### **➤ Ask for help**

Don't be afraid to ask for assistance or support if you need it. In addition to the Counselling Service there are many organisations set up on campus to ensure you have a successful and enjoyable time in Australia.

### **➤ □ Finally, relax and enjoy the journey!**

## Culture Shock:

**Culture shock** is the feeling of being out of place in an unfamiliar environment. The initial excitement of moving to a new country often subsides when different cultural expectations challenge you to attend to daily responses and behaviours previously taken for granted. The potential stress of dealing with these persistent challenges can result in feelings of hostility and frustration with your host country as well as a profound longing for home.



## Overcoming Culture Shock

Once you realise you have culture shock, getting over it and moving on to better adjustment with the host culture will depend on you. It is you who must take some positive steps to feel more at ease, and the sooner you take them, the better!

1. **Recognition:** First, you should remember that culture shock is a normal part of your adjustment and that you may have some of the symptoms. Some of your reactions may not be normal for you; you may be more emotional or more sensitive, or lose your sense of humour. Recognising your culture shock symptoms will help you learn about yourself as you work your way through it.
2. **Be objective:** Second, try to analyse objectively the differences you are finding between your home and your host country. Look for the reasons your host country does things differently. Remember that host customs and norms are (mostly) logical to them, just as your customs and norms at home are logical to you!
3. **Set goals:** Third, set some goals for yourself to redevelop your feeling of control in your life. These should be small tasks that you can accomplish each day. For example, if you do not feel like leaving your room, plan a short activity each day that will get you out. Go to a post office or store to buy something, ride a bus or go to a sports event. If you feel that language is your problem, set daily goals to learn more: study fifteen minutes a day; learn five new words a day; learn one new expression each day; watch a TV program in your new language for 30 minutes. Each goal that you achieve will give you more and more self-confidence that you can cope.
4. **Share your feelings:** Fourth, find local friends who are sympathetic and understanding. Talk to them about your feelings and specific situations. They can help you understand ideas from their cultural point of view.

## Australian Culture:

### Social Customs

#### Greeting People

When meeting someone for the first time, it is usual to shake the person's right hand with your right hand. People who do not know each other



generally do not kiss or hug when meeting. When you first meet someone, it is polite not to talk about personal matters.

Many Australians **look at the eyes of the people** they are talking with. They consider this a sign of respect, and an indication that they are listening. Do not stare at the person for a long time.

You can address a new acquaintance using their title and family name. You may use their first name when they ask you to or use it in the introduction. In the workplace and among friends, most Australians tend to be informal and call each other by their first names.

## **Clothing Customs**

The types of clothing that people wear reflect the diversity in our society just as much as the variation in climate. There are no laws or rules on clothing, but you must wear certain clothing for work situations. Most workplaces have dress standards.

Outside of the work situation, clothing is an individual choice; many people dress for comfort, for the social situation or the weather. Clubs, movie theatres and other places require patrons to be in neat, clean clothes and appropriate footwear.

Many Australians live close to the beach and the sea. On hot days, they may wear little clothing on the beach and surrounds. This does not mean that people who dress to go to the beach or swimming have low moral standards. It means that this is what we accept on and near our beaches.

People from other countries can choose to wear their national dress. They may be religious or customary items and include monks' robe, a burqa, a hijab or a turban. As a tolerant society with people from many different cultures, clothing is a part of cultural beliefs and practices that is encouraged.



## **Polite Behaviour**

'Please' and 'thank you' are words that are very helpful when dealing with other people, and buying goods or services. When asked if you would like something, like a cup of tea, it is polite to say, 'Yes please', or just 'please' if you would like it, or 'no, thank you' if you do not. When you receive something, it is polite to thank the person by saying 'thank you'. Australians tend to think that people who do not say 'please' or 'thank you' are being rude. Using these words will help in building a good relationship.

Sometimes a sensitive issue may come up in conversation. Not to talk may seem rude. It is more polite to say 'sorry, it is too hard to explain' than to ignore a question.

Australians often say, 'Excuse me' to get a person's attention and 'sorry' if we bump into them. We also say, 'Excuse me' or 'pardon me' if we burp or belch in public or a person's home.

You should always try to **be on time** for meetings and other visits. If you realise you are going to be late, try to contact the person to let them know. This is very important for visits to professionals as you may be charged money for being late or if you miss the appointment without notifying them before the appointment time.

Most Australians blow their noses into a handkerchief or tissue, not onto the footpath. This is also true for spitting. Many people will also say, '**Bless you**' when you sneeze. This phrase has no religious intent.

### **Australian Slang**

Most common word usage or 'slang' may seem strange to people new to Australia. Slang words start from many different sources. Some words are shortened versions of longer words. Many were expressions already used by migrants who came from the north of England. If you are unsure what an expression means, it is all right to ask the person who said it to explain. Some common expressions are:

- **Bring a plate** - when you are invited to a party and asked to 'bring a plate', this means to bring a dish of food to share with your host and other guests. Take the food to the party in any type of dish, not just a plate, and it is usually ready to serve. This is common for communal gatherings such as for school, work or a club. If you are unsure what to bring, you can ask the host.
- **BYO** - when an invitation to a party says 'BYO', this means 'bring your own' drink. If you do not drink alcohol, it is acceptable to bring juice, soft drink or soda, or water. Some restaurants are BYO. You can bring your own wine to these, although there is usually a charge for providing and cleaning glasses called 'corkage'.
- **Arvo** - This is short for afternoon. 'Drop by this arvo,' means please come and visit this afternoon.
- **Fortnight** - This term describes a period of two weeks.
- **Barbeque, BBQ, barbie** - outdoor cooking, usually of meat or seafood over a grill or hotplate using gas or coals. The host serves the meat with salads and bread rolls. It is common for a guest, when invited to a BBQ, to ask if they should bring anything.
- **Snag** - The raw type sausages usually cooked at a BBQ. They can be made of pork, beef or chicken.
- **Chook** - The term chook means a chicken, usually a hen.
- **Cuppa** - a cup of tea or coffee 'Drop by this arvo for a cuppa' means please come and visit this afternoon for a cup of tea or coffee.
- **Loo or dunny** - These are slang terms for toilet. If you are a guest in someone's house for the first time, it is usually polite to ask permission to use his or her toilet. 'May I use your toilet please?' Some people ask, 'Where's the loo?'



- **Fair dinkum** - honest, the truth. 'Fair dinkum?' when used as a question means, 'is it really true?'
- **To be crook** - to be sick or ill.
- **Flat out** - busy.
- **Shout** - to buy someone a drink. At a bar or a pub when a group of friends meet, it is usual for each person to 'shout a round', meaning buy everybody a drink. Each person takes a turn at buying a 'round'. It is also acceptable to say that you do not drink (alcohol) by saying that you are a 'teetotaler'. This also means you are not obliged to shout.
- **Bloke** - a man. Sometimes if you ask for help, you may get an answer to 'see that bloke over there'.
- **How ya goin?** 'How are you going?' means how are you, or how do you do? It does not mean what form of transport you are taking. Sometimes it can sound like 'ow-ya-goin-mate'.

For more information on Australian slang visit:  
[www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/slang](http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/slang)

### Responding to an Invitation

- **What could I be invited to?** If you get an invitation to lunch, dinner, barbeque, party, wedding, birthday, or any type of event you will usually respond with a letter or phone call. The midday meal is called lunch, and the evening meal is called dinner or 'tea'. 'Tea' can also mean a cup of tea or 'cuppa'. If invited for tea, the time of the event is a good sign of whether your host means dinner or just a cup of tea. An invitation to tea, for anytime after 6pm (1800 hours) usually means dinner.
- **How are invitations made?** Invitations can be written or spoken. Written ones usually ask for RSVP, (which is *repondez s'il vous plait* in French) and means please reply. You should reply whether you intend to go or not. The invitation will tell you how to reply and when the reply is expected. Your host may be specific about how many people are invited. If your host invites the whole family, you should tell your host how many people would go. Usually a family is the parents and their children.
- **What if I do accept an invitation?** When you accept an invitation to a meal, it is also usual to tell the host what you cannot eat. It is perfectly okay to say that you are a vegetarian and do not eat meat or that you are Muslim or Jewish and do not eat pork. **It is not polite to arrive late** and you should make a telephone call to your host to explain if you are going to be late.
- **What if I cannot accept an invitation?** You may not always be able to accept an invitation. The best way to refuse is to say, 'thank you, unfortunately I/we have other plans at that time'. To say that you are too busy may seem extremely rude, even if it is true. Once you accept an invitation, you should only cancel if something arises where you cannot go. You should also explain the reason to your host. To cancel because you got a better invitation from somewhere else can seem very rude, and can affect new



friendships. Sometimes it is best not to accept an invitation right away and to ask your host whether they would mind if you check your plans and reply to them later.

## **Tipping**

Tipping is not generally expected or practiced in Australia. This is because throughout Australia, service industry staff are covered by minimum wage laws and therefore do not rely on tips for their income. However, it is acceptable to leave a small amount (perhaps 10%) should you feel you have received exceptional service.

## **Public Holidays & Special Celebrations:**

Australians hold certain days each year as special days of national meaning. We may recognise the day with a holiday for everyone or we can celebrate the day as a nation with special events. Most States and Territories observe some of the public holidays on the same date. They have others on different dates or have some days that only their State or Territory celebrates. In larger cities, most shops, restaurants and public transport continue to operate on public holidays. In smaller towns, most shops and restaurants close.

### **New Year**

Australians love to celebrate New Year. There are festivals, celebrations and parties all over the country to welcome in the New Year. Sydney Harbour and Sydney Harbour Bridge have become synonymous with New Year celebrations in Australia the fireworks display is considered to be one of the best in the world. **January 1** is a public holiday.

### **Australia Day**

Australia Day, **January 26**, is the day we as a people and place celebrate our nationhood. The day is a public holiday. The day marks the founding of the first settlement in our nation by European people.



### **Easter**

Easter commemorates the resurrection (return to life) of Jesus Christ following his death by crucifixion. It is the most significant event of the Christian calendar.

In addition to its religious significance, Easter in Australia is enjoyed as a four-day holiday weekend starting on Good Friday and ending on Easter Monday. This extra-long weekend is an opportunity for Australians to take a mini-holiday, or get together with family and friends. Easter often coincides with school holidays, so many people with school aged children incorporate Easter into a longer family holiday. Easter is the busiest time for domestic air travel in Australia, and a very popular time for gatherings such as weddings and christenings.

### **Easter Traditions**

- **Shrove Tuesday or Pancake Day:** Shrove Tuesday is the last day before Lent. In earlier days there were many foods that observant Christians would not eat during Lent such as meat and fish, eggs, and milky foods. So that no food was wasted, families

would have a feast on the shroving Tuesday, and eat up all the foods that wouldn't last the forty days of Lent without going off.

- Pancakes became associated with Shrove Tuesday because they were a dish that could use up perishable foodstuffs such as eggs, fats and milk, with just the addition of flour.



- Many Australian groups and communities make and share pancakes on Shrove Tuesday. Selling pancakes to raise money for charity is also a popular activity.
- **Hot Cross Buns:** Hot cross buns are sweet, spiced buns made with dried fruit and leavened with yeast. A cross, the symbol of Christ, is placed on top of the buns, either with pastry or a simple mixture of flour and water. The buns are
- traditionally eaten on Good Friday; however in Australia they are available in bakeries and stores many weeks before Easter.
- A recent variation on the traditional fruit bun has become popular in Australia. A chocolate version is made with the same spiced mixture, but cocoa is added to the dough and chocolate chips replace the dried fruit.



- **Easter Eggs:** Eggs, symbolising new life, have long been associated with the Easter festival. Chocolate Easter eggs are a favourite part of Easter in Australia. Some families and community groups organise Easter egg hunts for children in parks and recreational areas. Easter eggs are traditionally eaten on Easter Sunday, however stores start stocking Easter treats well before the Easter holiday period.
- **The Easter Bunny:** Early on Easter Sunday morning, the Easter Bunny 'delivers' chocolate Easter eggs to children in Australia, as he does in many parts of the world.
- The rabbit and the hare have long been associated with fertility, and have therefore been associated with spring and spring festivals. The rabbit as a symbol of Easter seems to have originated in Germany where it was first recorded in writings in the 16th century. The first edible Easter bunnies, made from sugared pastry, were made in Germany in the 19th century.

## Anzac Day

Anzac Day is on **April 25** the day the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landed at Gallipoli in Turkey in 1915 during World War 1. This day is set apart to hold dear the memory of those who fought for our nation and those who lost their life to war. The day is a public holiday. We remember with ceremonies, wreath laying and military parades. You will find that many towns have an ANZAC Day parade and ceremony culminating in the laying of memorial wreaths at a monument or war memorial. These services can be very moving and a wonderful way of experiencing some Australian National pride, as the memories of our fallen soldiers are commemorated. Many Australians attend the National War Memorial in Canberra, or a War Memorial in one of the Capital Cities around Australia for either the traditional “Dawn Service”, which commemorates the landing of the ANZACS



at Gallipoli in the dark and dawning of that day, or another service usually commencing around mid-morning with a parade of returned armed forces representing all Australians who have fought in war. As Australia is such a multi-cultural country, these days it is common to see many other countries also represented in these parades.

ANZAC Day is the only day of the year where it may also be possible to attend an RSL (Returned Servicemen's League) Club to experience a traditional game of "TWO-UP". A game of chance played by the ANZACS where money is waged on the toss of three coins for a resulting combination of 2 out of 3 being either heads or tails. RSL clubs are crammed with returned soldiers and their families and friends on this day, the atmosphere is one of "mate-ship" and friendliness to all and the experience of a game of two-up is a memorable one.

### **Labor Day**

Labor Day is celebrated on different dates throughout Australia. As elsewhere in the world, Labor Day originated in Australia as a means of giving 'working people' a day off and recognising the roots of trade unionist movements and workers' rights.

### **Queen's Birthday**

The Queen's Birthday holiday celebrates the birthday of Queen Elizabeth II who is not only Queen of the United Kingdom but also Queen of Australia, where the Queen's Birthday is a public holiday celebrated on a Monday but on different dates. Having the Queen's Birthday on a Monday, results in a three-day long weekend.

### **Melbourne Cup Day**

The Melbourne Cup is a 2 mile international horse race run on the **first Tuesday of November each year** attracting the finest racehorses from around the world.



Known as the "race that stops a Nation" due to a Public Holiday being declared in metropolitan Melbourne in its home State of Victoria, and most of the nation whether at



work, school or home, stopping to watch the race broadcast on television. In other places, and mainly in the workplace, many people have a celebratory "Cup Day Breakfast", lunch, party or barbeque to celebrate Melbourne Cup. It is traditional to run a "Cup Sweep" where everyone wagers an amount per horse to create a total prize pool. The names of the horses entering the race are drawn and matched one by one to the list of people wagering money. After the race is won, the prize pool is divided into amounts for 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, & 3<sup>rd</sup>, and usually a small amount for last place, or horses scratched due to injury just before the race. The Melbourne Cup forms part of the "Spring Racing Carnival" which attracts celebrities from around the world. Women dress in their best outfits; hats are definitely the order of any day, gentlemen in suits of all sorts, and assorted other costumes. It's a very colourful time to be in Melbourne.

## Christmas

Christmas is celebrated in Australia on 25 December. Christmas is the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. Christians believe that Jesus is 'the son of God', the Messiah sent from Heaven to save the world.

The heat of early summer in Australia has an impact on the way that Australians celebrate Christmas and our English heritage also has an impact on some northern hemisphere Christmas traditions which are followed.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas houses are decorated; greetings cards sent out; carols sung; Christmas trees installed in homes, schools and public places; and children delight in anticipating a visit from Santa Claus. On Christmas Day family and friends gather to exchange gifts and enjoy special Christmas food. Australians are as likely to eat freshly caught seafood outdoors at a barbecue, as to have a traditional roast dinner around a dining table.

Many Australians spend Christmas out of doors, going to the beach for the day, or heading to camping grounds for a longer break over the Christmas holiday period. There are often places which have developed an international reputation for overseas visitors to spend Christmas Day in Australia. One such example is for visitors who are in Sydney at Christmas time to go to Bondi Beach where up to 40,000 people visit on Christmas Day.

**Carols by Candlelight** have become a huge Christmas tradition in Australia. Carols by Candlelight events today range from huge gatherings, which are televised live throughout the country, to smaller local community and church events.

Christmas in Australia is also associated with two major sporting events:

- **The Boxing Day Test:** December 26 is the opening day of the traditional 'Boxing Day Test' at the MCG (Melbourne Cricket Ground) between the Australian Cricket Team and an international touring side. It is the most anticipated cricket match each year in world cricket, and tickets are usually sold out months in advance.
- **The Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race:** the "Sydney-to-Hobart" is Australia's most prestigious yachting race and on the calendar of international yacht racing, and begins 26 December in beautiful Sydney Harbour.

## Home Fire Safety:

International students are increasingly appearing in statistics related to fire incidents and deaths in Australia. Sadly, most of these fires are preventable. You can take some simple steps to reduce the risk of fire in your accommodation.

Follow the fire safety tips below to help you reduce the chance of fire in your accommodation:



## Smoke Alarms

When you are sleeping you cannot smell smoke. Smoke alarms save lives. They wake you and alert you to the danger from smoke and fire. You **MUST** have a smoke alarm where you live, it is the law. All homes must have a smoke alarm on each level. Landlords are legally responsible for installation of alarms in rental properties. Tenants are responsible for testing and maintaining alarms. If you live on campus there will be a smoke alarm in your room. If you live off campus in a house or flat there must be a smoke alarm outside your bedroom.



Look after your smoke alarm; it can save your life.

- Test your smoke alarm monthly by pressing the test button.
- **DON'T** remove the battery
- **DON'T** take the smoke alarm down
- **DON'T** cover the smoke alarm
- Replace the battery in your smoke alarm yearly.
- Regularly vacuum over and around your smoke alarm to remove dust and debris to keep it clean.
- If there is no smoke alarm or it does not work report it to your landlord.



## Electricity

The safe use of electricity assists in preventing house fires.

- **Improper use of power boards and double adaptors can lead to fires.**

A double adaptor or a powerboard plugged into another double adaptor or powerboard creates a danger of overloading the system. For safety, use a single extension cord rather than joining shorter cords. Leaving an extension cord coiled while in use or placing a cord under floor coverings can cause overheating.



- **Be careful to keep electrical appliances away from water.**

A hair dryer takes time to cool down. For safety, allow this to happen on a inflammable surface before storing it.



- **Computers, monitors and TVs can overheat and cause fires even when not in use.**

They should be turned off after each session.  
Good air circulation is necessary around TVs

and videos. TVs should be turned off at the set, not only with the remote control.

- **Light globes can become very hot.**

It is dangerous to cover a lamp with any type of fabric. To dim a lamp it is recommended that a lower wattage globe is used.



## Heaters

It's nice to keep yourself warm in the cooler weather, but remember heaters are a major cause of house fires.

- Read and follow the operating instructions for your heater.
- All clothes and curtains should be at least one metre from the heater.
- Turn off all heaters before you leave your room or go to bed.
- Before you go to bed at night or leave your home, ensure heaters are turned off at their power source and fires are extinguished.



## Candles, Oil Burners and Cigarettes

Candles, oil burners and cigarettes can all be dangerous fire hazards.

- Do not smoke in bed.
- Dampen cigarette butts before putting them in the rubbish.
- Make sure your candles are on properly designed candle holders.
- Don't leave your room when a candle or oil burner is alight.
- Don't go to sleep when a candle or oil burner is alight.
- Do not put candles or oil burners near windows; be careful, curtains can catch fire easily.



## Cooking

Most house fires start in the kitchen.

- Prepare food only in the kitchen.
- Always stay in the kitchen while food is cooking.
- Hot oils and fats catch fire easily.
- DO NOT use water to put out an oil fire.
  - Use a dry powder extinguisher, fire blanket or saucepan lid to extinguish,
  - “If Safe To Do So”.
- Turn off the cooking appliance before you leave the room or go to bed.



## Plan Your Escape

In a Fire:

1. Get down on the floor. Crawl to the door.
2. Get out of your room.
3. Close the door. This prevents smoke and fire from spreading
4. Alert others.
5. When outside stay out.
6. Call **000**.



## Sun Safety:

Australia has the highest rate of skin cancer in the world. In fact, one in every two Australians will be diagnosed with skin cancer at some point during their lifetime. The good news is it can be prevented. By minimising your exposure to the sun’s damaging ultraviolet radiation (UVR), you can protect your skin and prevent the development of skin cancer.

## Sun Protection

Skin cancer and skin damage are caused by being exposed to the sun’s harmful ultraviolet radiation (UVR). The key to preventing skin cancer is to protect your skin from the sun by practising sun safe behaviours.

There are **six simple steps** you can follow to reduce your risk of skin cancer and protect your skin:

1. Minimise your time in the sun between 10am and 3pm
2. Seek shade
3. Wear suitable clothing that provides good sun protection



4. Choose a broad brim, legionnaire-style or bucket-style hat that will protect your face, neck and ears
5. Wear UV protective sunglasses
6. Apply SPF 30+ broad spectrum, water-resistant sunscreen 20 minutes before you go out into the sun.

### **Water Safety:**

There's nothing better than slipping into a cool pool, river, lake or ocean on a sweltering Australian summer day. Stay safe by following these steps.

- Always swim between the red and yellow flags at the beach. Lifeguards patrol this area, making it the safest area for swimmers, where you will avoid dangers like rips, undercurrents, rocks, reefs, jellyfish and other hazards.
- Always be careful of rip currents (also known as rips). These are strong currents of water running out to sea. If you get caught in a rip don't panic. Don't try and swim against the rip and if you are confident, swim parallel to the beach. If you feel you are unable to reach the beach at any time, raise your arm and call for assistance while floating to conserve your energy. Read more information on rips at [www.ripcurrents.com.au](http://www.ripcurrents.com.au).
- Obey the instructions given by lifeguards on the beach. They know what they are doing, and your compliance with their requests makes you safer. After all, you might need their help if you get into trouble.
- Don't swim at beaches that don't have lifeguards on duty.
- If you're swimming in a river, creek or dam, always check the water depth first and check for submerged hazards like rocks or logs. NEVER dive into water without first checking the water depth. Better still, walk in carefully.
- Never swim or operate a boat if you have been drinking alcohol. Alcohol can create physical changes (loss of balance, spasm of the vocal chords, increased risk of hypothermia) and behavioural changes (lack of coordination, risk-taking behaviour, impaired reaction time and judgement) that increase the chances of a water-related accident.
- If you have children with you, keep them under constant supervision. Make sure you can always see them and are close enough to respond if they get into trouble.
- Drowning can occur in a matter of seconds without any sound of splashing or crying to alert you.
- If you are on a boat, always wear a personal flotation device (PFD), even if you are not far from land.
- Remember that water conditions change quickly. Just because a beach was safe to swim at in the morning does not mean that it will still be safe in the afternoon.
- Do not enter any body of water (e.g. backyard swimming pools, the ocean, rivers, dams or other body of water) if you don't know how to swim. You can take lessons from a certified instructor at many local swimming pools. For a list of places near you, go to [www.austswim.com.au](http://www.austswim.com.au).

Read more about a wide range of water safety issues including water safety and alcohol, safety in swimming pools, boating safety and more at [www.royallifesaving.com.au](http://www.royallifesaving.com.au).

Read more about beach-related safety at [www.slsa.com.au](http://www.slsa.com.au).



Read more about swimming pool safety and children at [www.kidsalive.com.au](http://www.kidsalive.com.au).

## Beach Safety:



Understanding the ocean is very important - the more you know about how waves, wind and tides affect conditions in the water, the better able you are to keep yourself safe, or even rescue others, from danger. Recognising danger signs and awareness of surf conditions is an essential part of lifesaving.

### Remember the F-L-A-G-S and Stay Safe

**F** Find the flags and swim between them - the red and yellow flags mark the safest place to swim at the beach.



**L** Look at the safety signs - they help you identify potential dangers and daily conditions at the beach.

**A** Ask a surf lifesaver for some good advice - surf conditions can change quickly so talk to a surf lifesaver or lifeguard before entering the water.

**G** Get a friend to swim with you - so you can look out for each other's safety and get help if needed. Children should always be supervised by an adult.

**S** Stick your hand up for help - if you get into trouble in the water, stay calm, and raise your arm to signal for help. Float with a current or rip - don't try and swim against it.

And remember – **NEVER**

**Never** swim at unpatrolled beaches

**Never** swim at night

**Never** swim under the influence of alcohol

**Never** run and dive into the water

**Never** swim directly after a meal



## The Surf Environment

### Rips

A rip is a strong current running out to sea. Rips are the cause of most rescues performed at beaches. A rip usually occurs when a channel forms between the shore and a sandbar, and large waves have built up water which then returns to sea, causing a drag effect. **The larger the surf the stronger the rip.** Rips are dangerous as they can carry a weak or tired swimmer out into deep water.

### Identifying a Rip

The following features will alert you to the presence of a rip:

- darker colour, indicating deeper water
- murky brown water caused by sand stirred up off the bottom



- smoother surface with much smaller waves, alongside white water (broken waves)
- waves breaking further out to sea on both sides of the rip
- debris floating out to sea
- a rippled look, when the water around is generally calm

## **Surf Skills**

### **Escaping From a Rip**

If you are caught in a rip:

- Don't Panic - stay calm
- If you are a strong swimmer, swim at a 45 degree angle across the rip and in the same direction as the current until you reach the breaking wave zone, then return to shore
- If you are a weak or tired swimmer, float with the current, don't fight it. Swim parallel to the shore for about 30 - 40m until you reach the breaking wave zone, then swim back to shore or signal for help.
- Remember to stay calm and conserve your energy.

### **Negotiating the Surf**

Before entering the surf, always make note of a landmark such as a building or headland that can be seen from the water and used as a guide for maintaining a fixed position. Also check the depth of any gutter and the height of any sandbank before diving under waves – this will help prevent spinal injury.

When going out through the surf, negotiate the shallows by a high hurdle type of stride until the breakers reach your waist or until your progress is slowed.

Waves of any size and force should not be fought against and should be negotiated by diving underneath, giving you time to reach the bottom and lie as flat as possible on the sand while the wave passes over.

Your hands can be dug into the sand in front at arm's length for stability and as a pull forward when ready to surface.

If the water is deep enough, bring your knees up under your body so you can get a good push off the bottom, like an uncoiling spring. This gives added force to your next dive. Repeat this process until in chest-deep water and then start swimming.

If a broken wave approaches when the water is not too deep, dive down and run or crawl along the bottom. In deep water, do not use extra energy trying to reach the bottom; instead duckdive to just below the turbulence. Wait for the wash to pass and then push or kick to the surface (off the bottom, if possible).

Stick to your predetermined path on the swim out.

Check your position by occasionally raising your head for a quick look when swimming on top of a swell.



## **Bush & Outback Safety:**

Australia has many extraordinary and beautiful places to explore. If you are going on a trip, travel with other people, make sure someone knows where you are at all times and stay on a road or a walking track.

### **In the Bush**

Be prepared if you plan some time in our bushland. Plan your hike. Always tell someone where you are going and what time you expect to return. Let them know when you return safely.

- Check the weather forecast and be prepared for unexpected changes in weather.
- Check the length and degree of difficulty of your planned walk. Consider using a local guide when taking long or difficult walks.
- When walking or exploring outdoors drink plenty of water (allow at least one litre of water per hour of walking). Wear sturdy shoes and socks, a hat, sunscreen lotion, comfortable clothing and insect repellent. Other handy items for long bushwalks include food, warm clothing, first aid supplies, a torch and a map.
- **Never walk alone.** Read maps and signs carefully. Stay on the track and stay behind safety barriers.
- **Never dive** into a rock-pool, creek, lake or river. Stay away from cliff edges and waterfalls.
- Do not feed or play with native animals. You might get bitten or scratched.
- Limit your use of fire. Use a fuel stove for cooking and wear thermal clothing to keep warm. Never leave fires unattended or unconfined.
- Visit the ranger station or park information centre to obtain details on the best places to visit and any additional safety tips for that park.



### **Advice for Motorists Caught in Bush Fires**

Bush fires are common occurrences in Australia during our often long hot summers. If you are in smoke and fire-affected areas, you should stay off the roads. If you must get in the car, put your headlights on, dress in protective clothing and footwear and make sure you take food and water - you could be stuck for long periods if your journey is blocked by road closures. Turn the car radio on and keep it tuned to local stations for bush fire updates

- If you are caught in the middle of a bush fire, park the car immediately and remain calm
- Look for a clear area, preferably off the road. Areas clear of grass or bush are safest - they will not sustain fires of high intensity
- Do not leave the vehicle. Many people have lost their lives by exiting the vehicle only to be trapped on foot in the open. Your vehicle will help protect you from radiant heat, the chief danger
- Switch the ignition off. It is unlikely that a vehicle's fuel tank will explode from the heat of a passing bush or grass fire
- Close all windows and vents or turn vents to recycle

- Put the headlights on so that the car is as visible as possible, especially to fire tankers  
Everyone must get down on the floor, below window height and cover all exposed skin with a wool or cotton blanket. Do not use synthetics, which may give off toxic vapours or melt
- Stay in the vehicle until the fire front has passed. Generally this will take between 30 seconds and one minute. During this time it will be hot, noisy and frightening. It will last a short time even though it may seem longer
- If you have water, drink it
- Never attempt to drive through smoke or flame. Crashes can occur when drivers run off the road, striking trees or other cars
- Once the fire front has passed, exit the vehicle and inspect it for damage before proceeding
- Do not proceed until you are satisfied that the fire has passed and that you are not likely to be trapped a second time
- Falling trees and branches are a hazard during and after intense fires. Do not park or drive under trees
- Exit the area as quickly as possible. Remember fire vehicles may be trying to enter the area and your presence may hinder fire fighting operations.

### **In the Outback**

Australia's outback is vast. Our remote wilderness areas have few towns and facilities, often with large distances between them, so be aware and plan your trip.



- When planning each day of travel spend some time to calculate how long it will take to drive between destinations. Be realistic about how far you can drive in a day.
- Inform family and friends or the local police of your travel plans. The local police can also provide helpful advice on facilities and road conditions.



- Always carry a current road map.
- Make sure your vehicle is in good working order and has been serviced recently.
- Use a four-wheel drive vehicle on unsealed roads in remote areas. Take extra care when driving these vehicles. For example, drive at reduced speeds on unsealed roads.
- Always carry a spare tyre, tools and water. If travelling to remote areas off major highways take extra food, water, fuel and tyres. Do not overload your vehicle and never carry spare fuel inside an enclosed vehicle.
- **If you have trouble with your vehicle, don't leave your vehicle because it will provide you with shade and protection from the heat. Wait for help to come to you.**
- Hire appropriate emergency communication equipment, such as a satellite phone or an Emergency Position Indicating Radio Beacon device (EPIRB).
- Obey road closure signs and stay on recognised routes.
- Fires in desert and bush areas can spread very quickly. If required, be prepared to evacuate the area immediately.
- Australian wildlife and livestock often graze on the roadside and can stray onto the road. Be very careful when driving at sunrise, sunset and at night, when animals are most active. If an animal crosses in front of you brake gently, do not swerve wildly to avoid it.
- During daylight hours always drive with your headlights on low beam, as outback conditions can make it difficult to see oncoming vehicles.

### **Storm Safety:**

Storms can happen anywhere and at any time of the year. Storms are more common during storm season – from October to the end of April, but it is important to be aware all year round.

Severe storms can cause major damage. They may be accompanied by torrential rain, strong winds, large hailstones, loud thunder and lightning. Storms can cause flash flooding, unroof buildings, and damage trees and powerlines.

You can also be indirectly affected by storms even if your property is not damaged; such as losing power, or access roads being cut.





The SES is responsible for managing the clean-up and helping people during and after a storm.

During a storm, there are some things you can do to stay safe:

Stay indoors and away from windows.

Unplug sensitive electrical devices like computers, televisions and video recorders.

Listen to your radio for weather updates.

Don't use a landline telephone during an electrical storm

If you are caught outside during storm

Get inside a vehicle or building if possible.

If no shelter is available, crouch down, with your feet close together and head tucked in.

If in a group – spread out, keeping people several metres apart.

### **Dangerous Animals & Plants:**

Australia is home to a variety of native animals. Even if they seem friendly to you, do not touch or feed them - they are not used to close contact with humans and may hurt you

If you are visiting any of Australia's beautiful parks or forests:

**Be wary of animals in their natural habitat.** Stay well back from goannas, crocodiles, snakes, dingoes, cassowaries, and also wild pigs, cattle, horses and buffaloes. People have been seriously injured or killed by wild animals. Be very careful about approaching any injured animal, such as kangaroos or possums. They are likely to bite and scratch if you attempt to touch or move them.

**Never feed or play with wildlife.** Native animals are by nature timid; however, having been provided food from people may become aggressive in pursuit of food. You may get bitten or scratched. In addition, human foods may be harmful to native animals.

In the warm waters of Tropical Queensland:

**Take care to avoid marine stingers.**

**Do not enter water where crocodiles may live.**

### **Bites and Stings**

The majority of insects in Australia are not harmful to humans. Some insects bite and sting if they are threatened so it is best to avoid touching them if you want to avoid being stung or bitten.

The Australia-wide **Poisons Information Centres** have a common telephone number:

**131 126.**

Some people are allergic to certain insect bites or venom. In the case of an allergic reaction to bites or stings, medical attention should be sought immediately. Call a doctor or hospital for guidance, or **000**.

### **Anaphylaxis – allergic reactions**

**Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction** that can occur in sensitive individuals from exposure to any chemicals foreign to the body, including bites and stings, plants, or medications. Parts of the body, for example the face or throat swell up so much that the patient can't breathe. In severe cases the patient may go into shock within a few minutes and the heart can stop. **For any patient who shows signs of anaphylaxis, call 000 for an ambulance, and have the patient taken immediately to the emergency department of the nearest hospital.**

### **General First Aid for Bites and Stings**

For bites or stings from these creatures seek first aid assistance straight away, stay calm, and as immobile as possible.

- all species of Australian snakes, including sea snakes
- funnel web spiders
- blue ringed octopus
- cone shell stings

For all other bites and stings: Seek or apply basic first aid.

Wash with soap and water and apply an antiseptic if available Ensure that the patient's tetanus vaccination is up to date Apply an ice-pack to reduce local pain and swelling

Pain relief may be required eg. paracetamol or an antihistamine (to reduce swelling, redness and itch)

The patient should seek medical advice if they develop any other symptoms or signs of infection.

[www.health.qld.gov.au/poisonsinformationcentre/bits\\_stings](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/poisonsinformationcentre/bits_stings)