

# ART & CULTURE

Discover the most ancient culture on earth...

A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN INVITATION

Indigenous Australians are custodians to one of the world's oldest continuous cultures predating the Roman Empire and the building of the Pyramids. And they're eager to share their insights into this ancient land through art, story-telling, dance, and music.

Experience this ancient, fascinating and wonderful culture through cultural tours in places such as Uluru or by immersing yourself by staying in an Indigenous community, such as at Iga Warta in the Northern Flinders ranges. You can also have an Indigenous experience in places as unlikely as Melbourne's Botanic Gardens, along our coast or even on Sydney Harbour. And it's in our cities too that you'll find there are also great modern day examples of contemporary Aboriginal Australia – such as the Sydney-based Bangarra Dance Theatre and Perth's Black Swan Theatre.

Whether it's rock art and cave drawings from 50,000 years ago or the work of our modern day western desert artists working in co-operatives such as Papunya Tula, you can immerse yourself in a wealth of Aboriginal art and culture right across Australia.

Aboriginal culture is the oldest surviving unbroken string of cultural information in the world, the significance of which was summed up by art critic, Robert Hughes<sup>1</sup>, when he said, 'Aboriginal art is the most important art movement today'. It's little wonder so many Indigenous artists are now represented in major public and private collections, both in Australia and internationally, including the newly opened Musee du Quai Branly in Paris.

Indigenous people maintain and record their culture through Dreamtime stories depicted in rock paintings, corroborees, secret rituals and totems. Be it an ironwood carved burial pole, a barrage of white, dabbed dots and circles on canvas or deep ochre cave paintings depicting man's very beginnings of life in Australia, these artworks are timeless.

Learn about the culture of Torres Strait Islanders, Australia's other Indigenous culture. Whether based on the more than 100 islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea, which are their home, or on our mainland, they too, are proud to share their rich culture with you.

You can experience tribe members dress in their traditional costumes and find out about their customs and traditional ways of life. Or, watch as they demonstrate amazing spear throwing and boomerang throwing techniques, then try it yourself. Learn how to play the didgeridoo, watch a corroboree and learn how to do dot painting.

Learn about Aboriginal history and culture by attending a cultural festival. Discover modern Aboriginal culture in Australian cities as well as the outback – at galleries, cultural centres and contemporary dance performances.

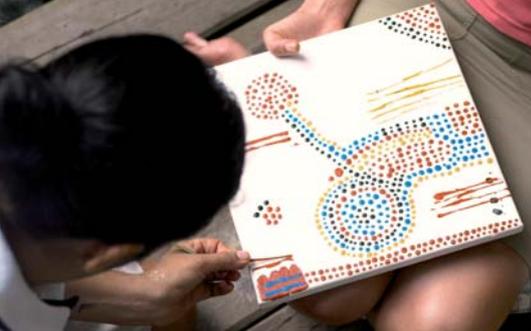
## Key art & culture facts

- Researchers remain divided on dates, but Australia was populated by "modern man" well before Western Europe. Aboriginal occupation for 50,000 years is generally accepted and some experts believe it began well before that.<sup>2</sup>
- Australian Aboriginal culture is deeply connected to the land.
- Visitors to Australia have the opportunity to learn about Aboriginal spirituality, the Dreamtime, tradition, ceremonies, bush foods and medicines.
- Australian Aboriginal culture is complex and diverse. It is one of the world's longest surviving cultures and is at least 50,000 years old (some think it is closer to 150,000 years). There were over 500 different clans or "nations" around the continent, many with distinctive cultures and beliefs, and hundreds of languages and dialects existed (although many are now extinct).<sup>3</sup>
- A network of language centres across Australia is working to document Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.<sup>5</sup>
- The world's oldest known art was created about 40,000 BC by Aboriginal people, who engraved animal images on rocks in the Olary region of South Australia.<sup>4</sup>
- Australian Indigenous culture continues to evolve, reflecting the lives and attitudes of Indigenous people today.
- Spirit ancestors govern and determine Aboriginal ritual activity, imparting a specific meaning to every step of a dance, every verse of a song and each pattern in a painting.

## Uniquely Australian

- **See the mysterious 'Bradshaw' paintings** which continue to amaze scholars who liken the figures to those in Egyptian temples. Some of our most famous rock art galleries are found in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, among them the Wandjina paintings of Dreamtime beings that travelled the land then disappeared into the rock wall, leaving their images behind. They are characterised by huge man-like shapes, sometimes more than seven metres tall.
- **Discover the Dampier Rock Art Precinct**, on the The Burrup Peninsula on the north western coast of Australia, one of the world's largest and most important collections of petroglyphs - ancient rock carvings dating back as far as the last ice age. This collection of standing stones may be the largest in the world and as important as Stonehenge; it has been listed as one of the 100 most endangered heritage sites on earth by the World Monuments Fund.<sup>6</sup>
- **Learn about Mungo Man and Mungo Woman** at Mungo National Park, one of the world's most significant anthropological sites. It





has some of the oldest remains of human occupation in the world. Explore it with local Aboriginal guides who can explain all the significant sites and cultural areas.

- **Watch a rainforest corroboree** by the Pamagirri dancers set to the haunting sounds of their didgeridoo and clapsticks in a World Heritage rainforest setting at Rainforestation Nature Park.
- **Visit the Tiwi people** of Bathurst and Melville Islands, north of Darwin, for a day of Aboriginal culture and hands-on activities.
- **Have an Aboriginal experience** in the midst of the World Heritage Daintree Rainforest. Go on an Aboriginal guided rainforest walk or create your own masterpiece in an Aboriginal art and cultural workshop. The spa at Daintree Eco Lodge specialises in Aboriginal massage techniques and spa experiences at a waterfall which is a powerful healing site for Aboriginal women.
- **See some of Australia's finest accessible Aboriginal rock art**, which can be easily reached from Jowalbinna Bush Camp at Laura, north of Cairns.
- **See traditional ochre bark painting**, fabric printing, fibre weaving and jewellery in places such as Nguuiu and Nhulunbuy, musical instruments such as didgeridoos, clapsticks and cast metal sculptures at Maningrida, extensive pre-history rock paintings and artifacts of stone and wood at Mt Borradaile or the huge Yintayin rock shelter (Tindale's "Endaen") on Stanley Island.

#### Art and culture in the city

- **Take the Aboriginal Heritage walk** in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Melbourne. Then, visit the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre at the Melbourne Museum, and the Koorie Heritage Trust, a cultural centre.
- **Learn about the culture and heritage** of Sydney's original Aboriginal inhabitants on a harbour tour on the Tribal Warrior, a walking tour in the Royal Botanic Gardens; then visit the Yiribana Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gallery at the Art Gallery of NSW.
- **See The Bangarra Dance Theatre**, Australia's innovative Indigenous dance company, perform in Sydney, its hometown.
- **In Adelaide, visit Tandanya**, an Indigenous owned and run national arts institute.
- **Meet some local Aboriginal people in Brisbane** at Riverlife Mirrabooka at Southbank on the Brisbane River.
- **Darwin and Alice Springs** are full of Aboriginal art galleries such as the Aboriginal Australia Art and Culture Centre and the Aboriginal Desert Gallery.

#### Cultural centres

- **See Australia through Aboriginal eyes** in the Red Centre at the Alice Springs Cultural Precinct.
- **At Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre** in the Grampians National Park, discover the culture of the Aboriginal communities of Western Victoria. Play the didgeridoo, dance, paint and learn to throw a boomerang.
- **The Quinkan and Regional Cultural Centre** at Laura on Cape York showcases the region's spectacular rock art. Quinkan country is famous for its giant 'spirit' figures known as Quinkans.
- **Discover the Torres Strait Islanders' rich culture** and unique heritage at the Gab Titui Cultural Centre on Thursday Island.
- **In Dandiiri Maiwar**, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures Centre at Queensland Museum, you can learn about Queensland's two distinct Indigenous cultures: the Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.

- **On the outskirts of Cairns**, the Tjapukai Aboriginal Cultural Park and dance theatre is a multi-media experience that uses live theatre, music and holograms to showcase the Aboriginal rainforest people of Tropical North Queensland.

#### Visit an aboriginal art gallery

- **Take a guided walk** through The Aboriginal Cultures Gallery at the South Australian Museum.
- **Buy an Aboriginal shell necklace** from a Tasmanian museum or gallery.
- **Gain insight into Indigenous Australia** in The Aboriginal Memorial at The National Gallery of Australia and at The First Australians Gallery in the National Museum, both in Canberra.
- **Broken Hill** in outback NSW, and the charming rainforest village of Kuranda in north Queensland are both treasure troves of Aboriginal art galleries, featuring renowned artists.
- **Buy investment quality Aboriginal Art** from community based art organisations in the Central and Western Desert and Kimberley region or at the many galleries around Australia.

#### Take an Indigenous tour

- **Around Australia**, Aboriginal run or led tours provide an insight into Indigenous culture and will take you to see cave and rock paintings or other sites of significance. Take a morning bush walk with an experienced Aboriginal guide, learn how to throw a boomerang and visit ancient Indigenous rock art sites with an Indigenous guide.

#### National Parks

- **On a Blue Mountains Walkabout**, see ancient artefacts and ceremonial sites, learn about ochre bark and body painting in the inspiring environment of the Blue Mountains National Park.
- **See the Melville Caves** in Victoria's Kooyooora State Park, home to an intriguing ancient campsite and learn about Aboriginal culture.
- **Drive to Namadgi National Park**, only an hour from Canberra, to see Aboriginal rock art.

#### Festivals

- **The Garma Festival** is a cultural exchange event held each year at Gulkula in North Eastern Arnhem Land.
- **The Dreaming Festival**, Australia's international indigenous music festival is an Indigenous cultural festival of dance, performance, arts and crafts held in Woodford annually, you'll see Indigenous theatre, dance and film performances.
- **The Laura Dance and Cultural Festival** is a spectacular biennial celebration of Cape York and Torres Strait culture.
- Held every second year on Thursday Island, the **Torres Strait Cultural Festival** celebrates the region's rich culture.

#### For further information please contact:

**Tourism Australia**  
**International Media Relations**  
GPO Box 2721  
Sydney NSW 1006  
Phone: +61 2 9360 1111  
Email: [internationalmedia@tourism.australia.com](mailto:internationalmedia@tourism.australia.com)  
[www.australia.com](http://www.australia.com)



1 Author of The Fatal Shore, and Time magazine's art critic for over 30 years, The New York Times described him as "the world's most famous art critic".  
2 [http://www.australia.com/Images\\_RichMedia/PDF-%20Adobe%20Acrobat/Aboriginal.pdf](http://www.australia.com/Images_RichMedia/PDF-%20Adobe%20Acrobat/Aboriginal.pdf)  
3 <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/aboriginalheritage/>

4 Australian Government [www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au](http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au)  
5 [www.fatsil.org](http://www.fatsil.org)  
6 <http://www.burru.org.au/>