

Our ancient land carries some of the world's most intriguing

NATURE

Residing in parks larger than many countries...

A UNIQUELY AUSTRALIAN INVITATION

It took the forces of earth, wind, fire and water 250 million years¹ to create the spectacle of nature in which Australians live, work and play.

From the smallest wonders of our tropical fish, rare plants, birds and gems, to world treasures like the Great Barrier Reef, Uluru and Kakadu National Park – the country is a spectacular canvas of nature's finest work.

We provide a home to plant and animal species found nowhere else on Earth – intriguing creatures such as kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, bilbies, and kookaburras (to name a few) – and we are custodians of 16 unique World Heritage Areas, some of the oldest rainforests on Earth and one-third of the world's protected marine areas², treasured by human-kind for their natural and/or cultural importance to us all.

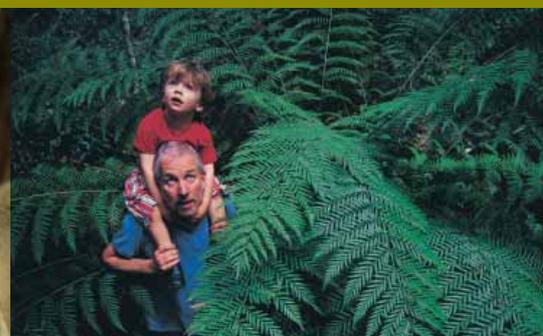
Our natural history holds unique keys to the planet's past, and tells stories as ancient as the world's oldest mountains³ and as fresh as a swim on the world's richest reef. Many parts of the country still bare the signs and artworks of man's early life, our landscape keeps the stories left by Indigenous people 50,000 years ago and, according to their Dreamtime, bears the marks of the spirits' journeys as they created all landforms and life.

There are many of nature's worlds to discover - untouched tropical rainforest, cathedrals of towering trees, canyons, golden beaches with calm water, hiking tracks, pristine rivers, great expanses of coast and desert, mountains, caves, snowfields and palm jungles are just the beginning.

Australia's natural wonders are yours to be enjoyed. They are easy to find and easily accessed – whether your desire is to snorkel on the Great Barrier Reef, take a guided walk through an ancient rainforest, walk along a secluded bush track, trek on a beach, or picnic in a park, the great outdoors is ready to be explored.

Some nature facts

- With a landmass of 7.68 million sq kms, this is the world's smallest continent and largest island.⁴ Australia is also the lowest, flattest, most stable continent, with desert comprising 35% of the land mass⁵.
- Australian native flora is the most diverse in the world, with about 20,000 different native species and more flowering plants than any other country.
- Australians are custodians of one-third of the world's protected marine areas, with more than 360 protected marine areas covering 65 million hectares⁶.
- The warm, crystal clear waters of the north sustain two of the world's great coral reefs. The Great Barrier Reef⁷ is one of the world's modern wonders while Ningaloo Reef⁸, on Western Australia's Coral Coast, is the most accessible reef experience in the world.
- Australia's marine environment is home to 4,000 fish species, 500 coral species (in the northern reefs alone), 50 types of marine mammal, seabirds, rare sea dragons and whales, dolphins, dugongs, turtles, giant rays and whale sharks.⁹
- Australia is home to 16 World-Heritage sites. One of these, Kakadu National Park, covers a land area of almost 20,000 sq kms – the same size as the country of Israel.
- About 81 million hectares (10.5%) of our land area is protected in National Reserve and there are 547 National Parks.¹¹
- The remote Kimberley in Western Australia is one of the world's last great wildernesses, covering 420,000 sq kms (around 20% larger than Germany). It features vast horizons, ancient gorges and places of immense beauty unlike anything on Earth¹².



NATURE

- The 270,000 sq km Nullabor Plain in Southern Australia is home to the longest section of straight railway track (487km) and the longest straight section of tarred highway (146.6km) in the world.
- The 135 million year old Daintree Rainforest is the world's oldest. It is home to about 430 species of birds, including 13 species found nowhere else in the world¹³.
- Many of our unique plants and animals are direct descendents of the old super-continent, Gondwana, that have survived nowhere else. The Huon Pine – one of the world's oldest living plants – is found only in Tasmania. Some trees date back at least 2,000 years while others are believed to be around 10,000 years old.
- Indigenous Australians learnt to read the country and plan their lives, festivals and travels by the flowering of plants and the behaviour of animals.
- Lyre birds, found in bushland areas, are the world's best imitators, able to mimic 15 other bird calls as well as sounds of chainsaws, mobile phones and car alarms, stringing them into melodies.
- Head inland – to the great Outback – and enjoy the formidable deserts and ancient wilderness areas that are so much a part of our heritage. This is a wonderful place to explore by four wheel drive or perhaps by plane if you believe the distances are just too great.
- Feast your eyes on the spectrum of vivid red, yellow, white, green and blue ancient landscapes, distinctive plants and intriguing wildlife that cannot be found anywhere else in the world – such as koalas, wombats and platypuses.
- Discover some of the oldest rainforest in the world and immerse yourself in the vibrant sounds and smells of nature – from waterfalls and wildlife, to the cry of our strange lyre bird and the whisper of wind in the eucalypts.

Or head to a wildlife park to get up close and personal with some odd looking creatures.

Uniquely Australian

- Exploring nature at her gentlest is easy as most of our great cities flank National Parks, spectacular coast or rivers and even offer peeks at the great forces of nature we treasure. They also provide a handy place from which to watch whales and dolphins in the seas and on their outskirts, walk fields of native wild flowers, visit forests, reefs, islands and sacred sites.
- But if that's too gentle, we have many wilder adventures for you to try. Why not try an underwater journey on one of our reefs, take a tour of a sacred site, trek through mountains eons old, walk on a canopy set high amongst an ancient forest, see how many of our 770 species of birds you can spot in our skies, or take a drive on the world's largest sand island.
- Take your time to be mesmerised by the land as it meets the sea. Explore craggy cliffs continually carved by sea, walk on beaches with sand like talcum powder, enjoy the startling contrasts of red desert merging with blue water, and languish in the shade of rich rainforests at the water's edge.

For further information or assistance please contact:

**Tourism Australia
International Media Relations**

GPO Box 2721

Sydney NSW 1006

Phone: +61 2 9360 1111

Email: internationalmedia@tourism.australia.com

www.australia.com

Tourism Australia 

1 www.Aussie-info.com/identity

2 Australian Ministry for the Environment and Heritage, 2005 press release

3 Australia has some of the oldest land surface on Earth, DFAT

4 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

5 Geoscience Australia

6 <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aib/environment.html>

7 <http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/>

8 www.australia.com/places_to_go/Beach

9 http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/env_glance.html

10 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

11 ibid

12 http://www.australia.com/places_to_go/outback/Prod_Map_STD1.aust?L=en&C=AU

13 <http://www.kurnell.com/aboutaustralia.htm>