PACK LIGHTLY

THREE COASTS, ONE VERY LARGE MAP

Australia

Which coast in which season, how long each leg really takes, and what to cut from a three-week plan before the distances do it for you.



p. 19 Distances that break plans: fly, drive or coach, in hours and AUD

p. 32 What a day costs in AUD, printed as a till receipt

p. 40 Sun, stingers, crocodiles and roo hours: the rules that matter

48 PAGES AUD PRICES ETA OR EVISITOR EDITION 2026.10

photo: Wikimedia Commons

Start here

the shape of an Australia trip, what it costs, what to sort first


SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE FROM CIRCULAR QUAY

Sydney to Perth is 3,300 km in a straight line, farther than London to Istanbul, and most first plans try to fit both in alongside Cairns and Uluru. They do not fit. Australia works when one coast gets two or three weeks and the rest waits for a second trip, so the real planning questions are which coast, in which season, and which legs get a plane.

The shape of a trip

Three weeks fits one of three routes: Sydney to Cairns down the east coast with two flights, a Red Centre loop with Sydney, or a Melbourne and Tasmania pairing. Pages 27 and 29 lay them out.

What a day costs

The budget tool puts a day at 80 USD for a backpacker, 180 mid-range and 400 comfort, which is roughly AUD 120, 270 and 600. Page 32 itemizes each one.

Sort before you fly

Most passports need an ETA from the official app (AUD 20 service charge), EU passports use the free eVisitor. Working-holiday visas and money are on page 33, the booking order on page 35.


WHITEHAVEN BEACH FROM HILL INLET LOOKOUT


TWELVE APOSTLES FROM THE GREAT OCEAN ROAD

HOW THE LINKS WORK

Booking links in this PDF are affiliate links: a commission is paid at no extra cost to the reader. Full disclosure is on the last page.

Contents

tap a line to jump straight there

01 What Australia is 06

02 Where to go 08

03 Distances, vans and the reef 18

04 Where to stay 22

05 Routes and itineraries 26

06 When to go, what it costs 31

07 Practical 35

08 Safe and smart 40

09 Tools, print cards, sources 44

QUICK JUMPS

Distances that break plans 19

What a day really costs 33

Sun, stingers and wildlife 41

Working-holiday money 34

Your trip on one page

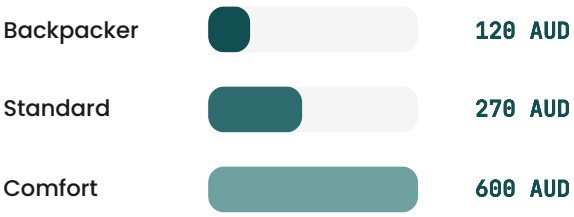
21 days, east coast · AUD 120 to 600 a day · best May, Sep or Oct

The default first trip runs Sydney, Byron Bay, the Whitsundays and Cairns over 21 days, with two flights and one coach leg doing the heavy lifting. Budget from the bars below, and book the Whitsundays sailing and the reef days first: both fill up in the dry season. Everything else is easier to sort once you land.

THE ROUTE



BUDGET PER DAY, AUD



BOOK FIRST

01	International and domestic flights, 8 to 10 weeks out	Skyscanner
02	Beds at Byron Bay and Airlie Beach, 6 to 8 weeks out	Stay22
03	eSIM, installed before departure	Saily

BEST MONTHS, EAST COAST PLUS RED CENTRE



- best: dry north, mild south, no stinger season
- shoulder: cold southern winter or the first hot, stinger-season weeks
- wet-season north, 40C Red Centre, peak prices (Dec to Mar)

Australia at a glance

scores 0-100 against the Oceania average · country-comparison data

Nature scores 95 and safety 90, with infrastructure close behind. Budget is the outlier at 30, barely under the Oceania average of 33 and the axis that decides how many days the trip lasts. Cities beat the region by ten points, which is why Sydney and Melbourne earn real days here and not just an airport night.

SCORECARD

Nature · region 95	95
Infrastructure · 93	95
Safety · 93	90
Cities · 75	85
Food and drinks · 78	80
Culture · 68	65
Budget friendly · 33	30

Budget travel	80 USD/day
Mid-range	180 USD/day
Luxury	400 USD/day

NATURE · BEACH · CITY · ADVENTURE · ROADTRIP

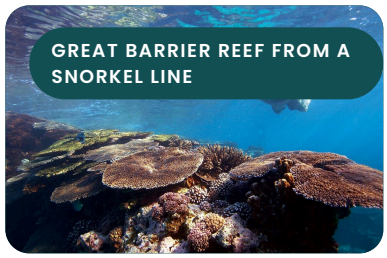
source: country-comparison tool, 2026-10 · region = Oceania average

SIX FRAMES OF THE TRIP


SYDNEY HARBOUR BRIDGE AT DUSK


MELBOURNE LANEWAY STREET ART


CAPE BYRON LIGHTHOUSE AT SUNRISE


GREAT BARRIER REEF FROM A SNORKEL LINE


DAINTREE RAINFOREST MEETING THE BEACH


KATA TJUTA DOMES IN LATE LIGHT

01

What Australia is

A continent with three time zones, climate zones that flip the calendar between north and south, and four regions worth knowing before you pick a route.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Distance, regions and seasons on one page 07

Distance, regions and seasons

Sydney to Perth 3,300 km · three time zones · seasons run backwards

Count flight hours, not kilometres. Sydney to Melbourne is 1.5 hours in the air, Sydney to Cairns 3, Sydney to Perth 5, and Perth sits two hours behind everything you saw on the way (three while the east coast runs daylight saving). Add six states, a tropical north with a wet season, an arid red middle and a southern coast with four seasons, and the country stops looking like one destination.

Seasons run opposite to Europe and North America: summer is December to February, winter June to August. In the tropical north the calendar is wet (roughly November to April) and dry (May to October), and the dry season is when the reef, the Daintree and the Whitsundays work. The Red Centre swings from 40C summer days to near-freezing winter nights.

CAPITAL
Canberra
3h by road from Sydney, optional

TIME ZONES
3
Perth 2h behind Sydney

CURRENCY
AUD
card works almost everywhere

BEST MONTHS
Sep-Oct, May
dry north, mild south

FOUR REGIONS, FOUR TRIPS



WHITSUNDAY ISLANDS FROM A SAILBOAT

East coast, Sydney to Cairns

surf, islands, reef, rainforest · where most three-week trips live

Sydney, Byron Bay, K'gari, the Whitsundays and Cairns sit on one flight path. The reef and the rainforest are both here, which is why the coast wins first trips.



RED DESERT ROAD TOWARD KINGS CANYON

Red Centre

Uluru, Kata Tjuta, Kings Canyon · fly in, do not drive from the coast

Alice Springs is 450 km from Uluru and 1,500 km or more from any coast. Two or three nights is enough; the rest is road.

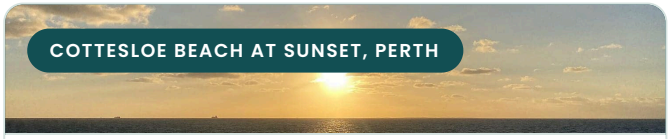


GREAT OCEAN ROAD NEAR APOLLO BAY

South: Melbourne, Great Ocean Road, Tasmania

four seasons, cold winters · coffee, coast and wilderness

Cool and changeable, best from September to April. Pairs well with Sydney; Tasmania needs its own four to five days.



COTTESLOE BEACH AT SUNSET, PERTH

West: Perth and Ningaloo

5h flight from Sydney · a second trip, or a long first one

Beaches, Rottnest Island and, 1,200 km north, a reef you can swim to from shore. Cheap to skip, hard to reach again.

WHO THIS PDF IS BUILT FOR

Three-week first-timer
East coast, two or three flights, mid-range beds, reef days booked ahead.

Working-holiday traveller
Aged 18 to 30 or 35, hostel beds, farm or hospitality shifts (page 33).

Campervan couple
Relocation deals, freedom-camping rules and fuel maths (page 20).

Two-week short-haul visitor
Sydney plus the Red Centre, one internal flight each way.

photos: Wikimedia Commons

02

Where to go

Two big cities, five coastal and outback regions, one island state. Choose the coast before the dates: the same week is peak season in Cairns and winter in Hobart.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Sydney 09

Melbourne and the Great Ocean Road 10

Byron Bay and the Gold Coast hinterland 11

K'gari and the Fraser Coast 12

The Whitsundays and Airlie Beach 13

Cairns, the reef and the Daintree 14

Uluru and the Red Centre 15

Perth and the west 16

Tasmania, briefly 17

Sydney

harbour, surf and a national park · 4 nights · best Sep-Nov



MANLY FERRY CROSSING SYDNEY HARBOUR

Take the Manly ferry from Circular Quay at 8am and the harbour does the introduction: Opera House on one side, Harbour Bridge behind you, surf at the far end 30 minutes later. Four nights is the number. Two for the harbour and the Rocks, one for the Bondi to Coogee coast, one for a day out of town, and the city is also the most expensive stop on the route, with dorm beds around AUD 45 to 70.

The Bondi to Coogee walk is about 6 km and takes two hours with swim stops, so start before the beach fills. The Blue Mountains are roughly two hours by train from Central. Skip the Harbour Bridge climb, which runs to several hundred AUD: the pedestrian walkway across the bridge is free and gives the same harbour view.

Public transport accepts a tap of a contactless bank card or an Opal card, and fares are capped daily and weekly, so skip buying single tickets.

Vivid Sydney, the harbour light festival, runs late May into June and pushes beds up. Book earlier or pick another fortnight.

Bondi to Coogee coastal walk

About 6 km of sandstone cliffs and ocean pools; walk it north to south with the sun behind you.

Manly ferry from Circular Quay

A 30-minute harbour ride that costs a transit fare, not a cruise ticket.

Blue Mountains day trip

Three Sisters and the escarpment walks, reached by train from Central in about two hours.

Royal National Park

Coastal tracks and beaches around an hour south of the city by public transport.

GO DEEPER

Beach-by-beach detail sits on the Sydney page, and the Bondi to Coogee write-up has the full route.

Melbourne and the Great Ocean Road

laneways, coffee and a 243 km coast road · 3 nights + 1-2 days on the road



TWELVE APOSTLES LIMESTONE STACKS AT SUNSET

The best thing in Melbourne has no entry fee: the laneways between Flinders Lane and Little Collins Street, where cafes open at 7am and the street art on Hosier Lane gets painted over every few weeks. Three nights covers the laneways, a market morning, St Kilda at dusk and a food-led evening or two. The Melbourne Cup, on the first Tuesday of November, pushes beds up for the week around it.

The Great Ocean Road runs 243 km from Torquay to Allansford, and the Twelve Apostles sit about four hours from the city by road, with fewer stacks standing than the name promises. A one-day coach tour is 12 hours for roughly 4 hours of actual stops. Skip it if you can drive: hire a car for two days and sleep in Apollo Bay or near Port Campbell.

The Apostles are best in the last hour of light, when the limestone turns orange and most tour buses have gone.

Melbourne weather changes in a day in any month. Carry a rain layer even in summer, and a warm one from May to September.

Hosier Lane and the laneways

Free, best before 10am, before the tour groups and the queues for coffee.

St Kilda beach and breakwater

A tram ride from the centre; little penguins come ashore at the breakwater at dusk.

Twelve Apostles, late afternoon

The headline stop, roughly four hours from the city; add Gibson Steps and Loch Ard Gorge.

Phillip Island penguin parade

Around 1h45 southeast of Melbourne; the parade runs at dusk, so plan a late return.

READ ON Stops and timings are on the Great Ocean Road page, and the Melbourne page covers the city itself.

Byron Bay and the Gold Coast hinterland

surf, lighthouse, rainforest · 3 nights · best Sep-Nov



Cape Byron is the most easterly point of the Australian mainland, and the loop walk to the lighthouse at sunrise is the reason to sleep within reach of it. A beginner surf lesson in a small group lists from about 63 USD for three hours, and humpback whales pass the cape on their migration roughly from June to November. Julian Rocks marine reserve, just offshore, is the snorkel and dive site.

Byron has no airport of its own: Ballina is about 30 minutes away, the Gold Coast about 45, Brisbane about two hours. Beds spike hard in school-holiday weeks (Christmas to January, Easter, July, late September). The hinterland is the better value: Lamington National Park is subtropical rainforest with walking tracks, inland from the Gold Coast. Skip the Surfers Paradise strip and take Burleigh Heads for the beach.

Swim only between the red and yellow flags. Byron's beaches have rips, and the patrolled stretch is the short one.

Reserve the sunrise walk and the dive boat a day ahead in school holidays; walk-up space runs out.

Cape Byron Lighthouse walk

A short loop to the mainland's eastern tip; go at first light and walk back along the cliffs.

Julian Rocks snorkel or dive

Turtles year-round, grey nurse sharks in season; boats run from Byron's main beach.

Lamington National Park

Subtropical rainforest and walking tracks in the Gold Coast hinterland; a hire car makes it easy.

Burleigh Heads

The Gold Coast beach worth the stop: a headland walk, a surf break and no high-rise wall.

MORE ON THE SITE The Byron Bay page and the Gold Coast page list beaches, hikes and surf lessons in full.

K'gari and the Fraser Coast

4WD only · 2 to 3 nights · permit and dingo rules apply


4WD ON 75 MILE BEACH, K'GARI

⚠ Walk in groups at dusk and never run from a dingo. Stay calm, face it and back away slowly.

🕐 K'gari does not fit a 21-day east coast plan alongside the reef. Add it from four weeks, or in a camper.

The main road on K'gari is the beach, and the tide timetable is the traffic law. The world's largest sand island is reached by barge from Hervey Bay or Rainbow Beach, which sit about four hours north of Brisbane by road. Only four-wheel-drive vehicles are allowed, and a vehicle access permit is required, so most backpackers book a two-day small-group tour instead of driving themselves.

Skip swimming in the ocean here: rips and sharks make the freshwater lakes the place for a swim, with Lake McKenzie the one on every itinerary. Dingoes are wild and unpredictable. Never feed them, keep children within arm's reach and fines apply for breaking the rules. Hervey Bay is also the whale-watching base from roughly late July to early November.

Lake McKenzie

A perched freshwater lake with white silica sand; the swim you cannot get in the ocean.

75 Mile Beach

The island's highway, driven at low tide; plan every transfer around the tide table.

Maheno shipwreck

A rusting liner washed up on the beach in 1935; best photographed at sunrise.

Hervey Bay whale watching

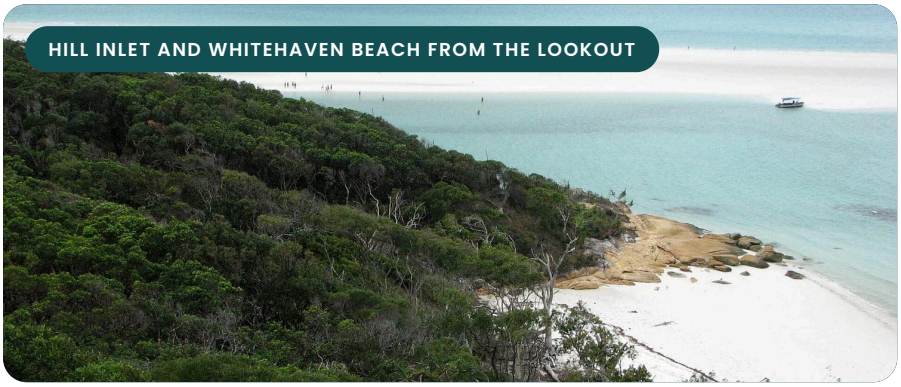
Humpbacks rest in the bay on migration, roughly late July to early November.

KEEP READING

The K'gari page covers tracks, lakes and permit steps; Noosa is the usual stop on the drive up from Brisbane.

The Whitsundays and Airlie Beach

74 islands, one sailing trip · 4 nights · stinger suits November to May



HILL INLET AND WHITEHAVEN BEACH FROM THE LOOKOUT

Sailing is the splurge worth making on this coast. A full-day sailing trip from Airlie Beach lists from about 183 USD, a Hamilton Island reef snorkel day from 233 USD, and an overnight reef sleep from 633 USD (Viator, 2026-10). Whitehaven Beach is 7 km of silica sand that stays cool underfoot, and the swirling colours at Hill Inlet depend on the tide, so ask the skipper which window your trip lands in.

Airlie Beach is the backpacker base, about 30 minutes by shuttle from Proserpine airport, and boats leave from the marina. Hamilton Island has its own jet airport but resort prices, so skip staying there on a backpacker budget and sleep in Airlie. Sailing operators supply stinger suits in the warm season, which is the main reason this stop is better from May to October.

Book the sailing trip first and the beds around it. Shared overnight boats fill weeks ahead in the dry season.

Take seasickness tablets before the boat leaves the marina, not after. Trade winds blow hardest from June to September.

Whitehaven Beach

Seven kilometres of near-white sand; go at low crowd hours, early or late in the day.

Hill Inlet lookout

A short walk to the view over shifting sand and turquoise channels, tide permitting.

Airlie Beach lagoon

A free, stinger-safe swimming lagoon on the foreshore, since the sea beach is not for swimming.

Heart Reef scenic flight

The reef shaped like a heart is only visible from the air; a splurge, weather permitting.

THE LONG VERSION Island by island, the Whitsunday Islands page and Airlie Beach cover tours and where to sleep.

Cairns, the reef and the Daintree

launchpad for reef and rainforest · 5 to 6 nights · best May-Oct



DAINTREE RAINFOREST MEETING THE BEACH AT CAPE TRIBULATION

Cairns is a launchpad, not a destination. The Esplanade lagoon is the swimming spot, the tidal flats beyond it are not, and the three things worth the airfare all start at the marina or on the highway north: the outer reef, the Daintree and the Atherton Tablelands. Allow five or six nights so a rain day or a rough-sea cancellation does not cost you the reef.

The Daintree is two to three hours north of Cairns by road, crossed by a cable ferry, and ends where the rainforest meets the beach at Cape Tribulation. Saltwater crocodiles live in these rivers, so swim only where signs say you can and treat the absence of a sign as no guarantee. The Tablelands add waterfalls you can swim at, and the Kuranda Scenic Railway is the easy half-day.

⚠ Crocodile and stinger warning signs are literal. The full rules are on page 40.

🕒 Port Douglas, about an hour north, is the alternative base for Agincourt-style outer reef boats and for the Daintree.

Outer reef day boat

The reason to come; page 21 explains which boat to pick and which to skip.

Daintree and Cape Tribulation

Boardwalks, a river wildlife cruise and a beach backed by rainforest; give it a full day.

Atherton Tablelands waterfalls

Josephine Falls and Millaa Millaa Falls are the swim stops, a hire car day from Cairns.

Kuranda Scenic Railway and Skyrail

Go up by rail, come down by cable car, or the reverse; a relaxed half day.

ON THE WEBSITE The Cairns page, Daintree rainforest and Port Douglas cover the full list.

Uluru and the Red Centre

Anangu country · 2 to 3 nights · fly in, do not drive from the coast



ULURU FROM THE SUNRISE VIEWING AREA

The climb closed on 26 October 2019, and the 10.6 km base walk replaced it as the thing to do. Done at sunrise it takes three to four hours, costs only the park pass, and is the better option next to the tour packages: a Segway circuit lists from about 124 to 146 USD, a scenic flight from 127 USD (Viator, 2026-10). Walk it before the heat and the flies arrive.

Fly in: Uluru has its own airport with direct flights from the east coast, and Yulara, the resort village at the park gate, is the only base close to the rock. Alice Springs is 450 km away, about five hours by road, and Kings Canyon sits roughly three hours from Yulara. Kata Tjuta's Valley of the Winds walk closes in extreme heat, so go at first light.

Bring a fly net from October to April. They are cheap at Yulara and make the base walk bearable.

⚠ Do not photograph signed sacred sites along the base walk. Respect page 41.

Uluru base walk

A 10.6 km loop of the rock; start at sunrise and carry more water than you expect to drink.

Kata Tjuta, Valley of the Winds

Domed rock formations 50 km away; the walk closes in extreme heat, so go early.

Kings Canyon rim walk

A three-hour walk above 100 m cliffs; start at dawn and skip it on very hot days.

Alice Springs and Larapinta

The outback hub and the start of the multi-day trail through the MacDonnell Ranges.

MORE DETAIL

The Uluru page and Alice Springs cover the Red Centre beyond the rock.

Perth and the west

short: 3 nights · beaches, Rottnest, Fremantle · 5h flight from Sydney



QUOKKA ON ROTTNEST ISLAND

Fly into Perth, out of Perth. Driving anywhere else in the west is multi-day and fuel is dearer.

Quokkas are wild. Do not feed or touch them, and keep selfies to a distance.

The nearest big city to Perth is Adelaide, 2,100 km east, and that gap decides everything: Perth is a second trip or a long first one. With three nights, do the city and Rottnest Island, where the ferry from Fremantle takes about half an hour and quokkas wander the paths. Cycle the island, which is largely car-free, and swim in the bays on the far side.

Ningaloo Reef is 1,200 km north and worth doing only by air: fly Perth to Exmouth and swim to the reef from shore. Whale sharks visit from roughly March to July. The Pinnacles Desert is a two-hour drive north of Perth, Margaret River wine and surf country about three hours south, and Perth runs two hours behind Sydney, three during east-coast daylight saving.

Rottnest Island

Half an hour by ferry from Fremantle; hire a bike and ride to the quiet bays.

Fremantle

The old port town with a market and a harbour front, a short train ride from Perth.

Pinnacles Desert

Limestone spires in sand, about two hours north; go at sunset for the long shadows.

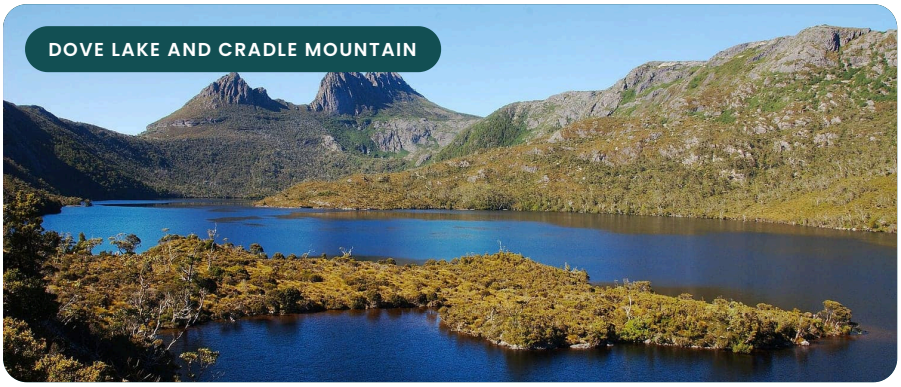
Ningaloo whale shark season

Roughly March to July; fly to Exmouth rather than drive the 1,200 km.

WORTH A READ The Perth page, Rottnest Island and Ningaloo Reef have the logistics.

Tasmania, briefly

Hobart, Cradle Mountain, Wineglass Bay · 4 to 5 days · an add-on, not a day trip


DOVE LAKE AND CRADLE MOUNTAIN

Book Overland Track places and Cradle Mountain parking early for October to May.

Hobart to Cradle Mountain is about four hours by road and Hobart to the Wineglass Bay trailhead about two and a half, so Tasmania looks small on the map and drives like a much larger place. It needs a hire car and at least four days: Hobart for MONA and the Saturday Salamanca Market, the east coast for Wineglass Bay, the northwest for Cradle Mountain.

The Wineglass Bay lookout walk takes about an hour return. The Overland Track is 65 km over six days and needs a booking in peak season, from October to May. Snow can fall at Cradle Mountain in any month, so pack a warm layer even in summer. Add Tasmania only with four or more days; otherwise skip it. Fly Melbourne to Hobart in about 1h20 or take the overnight ferry to Devonport.

Cradle Mountain, Dove Lake

The loop walk around the lake; wildlife at dusk and weather that changes hourly.

Wineglass Bay lookout

About an hour return; the beach below adds time if you want the sand.

MONA and Salamanca Market

The museum a ferry ride from Hobart and the Saturday market on the waterfront.

Port Arthur Historic Site

The convict-era site about 90 minutes from Hobart; give it half a day.

SEE ALSO The Tasmania page and the Hobart page cover the loop in detail.

03

Distances, vans and the reef

What each leg costs in hours and AUD, the campervan maths, and how to see the reef without wasting a day on the wrong boat. No other trip is shaped by these three the way Australia is.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Distances that break plans 19

Campervan or not 20

The reef: how to see it well 21

Distances that break plans

fly, drive, coach or train · hours and AUD · pick by distance, not by habit

Sydney to Cairns is 2,400 km by road. A flight takes three hours, and booked ahead it often costs less than the fuel for a campervan on the same route. That is the rule for the whole country: past about 1,500 km, fly. Under 500 km, a car or a train is fine. In between, the answer depends on whether the drive is part of the trip.

LEG	BY ROAD	FLY (ADVANCE FARE, AUD)	DRIVE OR CAMPER	COACH OR TRAIN
Sydney to Melbourne	880 km	1h30, 60 to 200	about 10h	coach about 12h, train about 11h
Sydney to Brisbane	920 km	1h30, 70 to 220	10 to 11h	coach and train both 14h or more
Brisbane to Cairns	1,700 km	3h, 120 to 300	about 20h	coach 28h or more
Sydney to Cairns	2,400 km	3h, 150 to 350	about 28h	coach 40h or more
Alice Springs to Uluru	450 km	no direct route	about 5h	shuttle about 6h
Sydney to Perth	3,900 km (3,300 km in the air)	5h, 250 to 500	four days or more	Indian Pacific train, 3 nights

road distances and times rounded from a road atlas · fares are 2026 planning ranges, check live before booking

Daylight saving runs from the first Sunday in October to the first Sunday in April in NSW, Victoria, SA, Tasmania and the ACT. Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia stay put, so a Sydney to Brisbane flight can gain or lose an hour.

Low-cost fares usually exclude checked bags, so compare like for like. For ground legs that exist, the 12Go route planner lists what runs.

Price the leg you actually need. Flights beat the road on every leg over about 1,500 km.

Compare on Skyscanner

DIG IN

Domestic flights across Australia and the Sydney to Cairns write-up cover carriers and timings.

Campervan or not

relocation deals · freedom camping · fuel maths

A two-berth campervan burns about 12 litres per 100 km. Sydney to Cairns at 2,400 km is roughly 290 litres, or about AUD 580 at AUD 2 a litre, before the hire fee. Regional roadhouses charge noticeably more. So: take a camper if the trip is three weeks or more on one stretch of coast, or a one-way relocation. Otherwise fly and rent a small car for the legs that need one.

OPTION	TYPICAL DAILY COST	BEST FOR	THE CATCH
Relocation deal	token hire fee, plus about AUD 70 of fuel on a 300 km day	One-way legs such as Sydney to Cairns, flexible dates	Fixed pick-up and drop-off dates, 3 to 7 days to cover the leg
Standard 2-berth hire	AUD 100 to 200 hire, plus fuel	Couples on three weeks or more along one coast	Peak-season rates climb, minimum hire periods apply
Small car plus hostels	AUD 50 to 100 hire, plus fuel and beds	Short stretches, Great Ocean Road, Daintree	No bed in the car, parking costs in cities
Flights plus tours	one-off fares, no fuel	Plans that include Uluru or Perth	Tours add up fast; see page 19

fuel and hire ranges: 2026 planning figures, rates move with season and fuel price

⚠ Freedom camping is legal only where a sign allows it, and councils set the rules and the fines, which reach hundreds of dollars. Caravan parks are the safe default, commonly AUD 35 to 60 a night.

💳 A foreign licence in English is accepted. A licence in another language needs an official translation or an International Driving Permit.

DRIVING RULES THAT BITE

- [ ] Drive on the left. Rural highways are generally limited to 110 km/h, fixed by sign.
- [ ] Kangaroos move at dawn and dusk. Avoid driving at night outside towns.
- [ ] Fill the tank at every roadhouse in the outback; gaps of 200 km or more are normal.
- [ ] Road trains are very long. Pass only on a clear straight and give them space.

THE FULL PICTURE Permit and traffic detail is on the driving in Australia page.

The reef: how to see it well

outer vs inner reef · day boat vs liveaboard · skip the wrong boat



SNORKELLER OVER CORAL AT FLYNN REEF

The Great Barrier Reef is about 2,300 km long, and what you see depends on the boat, not the ticket price. Inner-reef trips (Green Island, Fitzroy Island) are cheaper and shorter but busier, with patchier coral. Outer-reef boats from Cairns and Port Douglas take roughly 90 minutes to two hours each way and reach clearer water and healthier reef. Mass bleaching hit in 2016, 2017, 2020, 2022 and 2024, so condition varies by reef and year. Skip the cheapest inner-reef boat if coral is why you came.

OPTION	TIME	FROM (USD, VIATOR 2026-10)	VERDICT
Outer-reef day boat	8 to 10h, 3 to 4h in the water	from about AUD 200 to 300, check live	The default pick from Cairns or Port Douglas.
Hamilton Island reef snorkel	8h	233	Right if Airlie Beach is the base; weather-dependent.
Overnight reef sleep	2 days	633	The splurge: a night on a pontoon under the stars.
PADI Open Water, 4 days	4 days, from Cairns	668	Learn to dive on the reef, if you are staying a while.
Liveaboard, Ribbon or Osprey Reef	3 days or more	four-figure AUD	For certified divers; the best sites sit far offshore.

tour prices: Viator Partner API, captured 2026-10-03 · outer-reef day price is a planning range

The dry season, roughly June to October, brings calmer seas and no stingers. Minke whales visit the Ribbon Reefs in June and July.

Wear a rash vest instead of sunscreen in the water. Take seasickness tablets before boarding for the trade-wind months.

GO DEEPER Site by site, the Great Barrier Reef page and the snorkeling page compare spots and operators.

04

Where to stay

Which neighbourhood, what a bed costs in AUD, and which stops need booking weeks ahead. Hotel maps open on Stay22 for each base.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Sydney and Melbourne 09

Byron Bay and the Whitsundays 24

Cairns, Alice Springs and Uluru 25

Where to stay: Sydney and Melbourne

AUD per night, double room · 2026 planning ranges · both cities peak around events

Book the first two Sydney nights ahead and leave the rest flexible. Beds jump around Vivid (late May into June), New Year's Eve and the Christmas to January school holidays, and the Melbourne Cup week in early November does the same in Melbourne. Outside those windows, walk-up rates in either city often come in under what the booking sites show for the same night.

Sydney

hostel AUD 45 to 70 **mid AUD 200 to 300** **comfort AUD 400+**

Surry Hills and the streets around Central for trains and food, Manly for a beach base with a ferry commute, Bondi for the beach and a longer ride in. The Stay22 hotel map for Sydney opens near the airport, so drag it to the harbour.

Melbourne

hostel AUD 35 to 55 **mid AUD 160 to 250** **comfort AUD 350+**

The CBD and Southbank put every tram line at the door, Fitzroy suits cafes and bars, St Kilda the beach. Compare rooms on the Stay22 hotel map for Melbourne, which also opens near the airport and needs a pan to the city centre.

Beds across every stop in this PDF, with free-cancellation rates flagged. **Find Stays**



Hostels in both cities cluster near the central train stations. Check the room count and the lock-in policy before you book a six-bed dorm.

Many cheaper rooms in older buildings have no air conditioning. In a Sydney February heatwave that matters more than the star rating.

Where to stay: Byron Bay and the Whitsundays

AUD per night, double room · 2026 planning ranges · both book out in school holidays

Byron Bay and Airlie Beach are the two stops where early booking pays. Byron fills in school-holiday weeks (Christmas to January, Easter, July, late September), and Airlie's beds go with the dry-season sailing departures. Book the sailing trip first, then the nights on either side of it.

Byron Bay

hostel AUD 45 to 65 **mid AUD 200 to 300** **comfort AUD 400+**

In town or a walk from Main Beach for the cafes and the lighthouse walk; Suffolk Park to the south is quieter and cheaper. See the Stay22 hotel map for Byron Bay for what is open on your dates.

Airlie Beach

hostel AUD 30 to 45 **mid AUD 150 to 220** **comfort AUD 300+**

The town centre for bars and the lagoon, Abell Point Marina for the sailing departures. Hamilton Island is a resort island; save it for a splurge. Browse the Stay22 hotel map for Airlie Beach before choosing.



YACHTS AT ANCHOR IN AIRLIE BAY

Take a free-cancellation rate in Airlie. A cancelled boat in rough weather can push your sailing back a day.

Byron's nights are noisy near the main strip. Ask for a room facing away from it, or sleep in Suffolk Park.

Where to stay: Cairns, Alice Springs and Uluru

AUD per night, double room · 2026 planning ranges · Uluru has one village

Cairns has the most beds and the cheapest ones on this route, so book the reef boat first and the nights after. The Red Centre is the opposite. Uluru has a single resort village, Yulara, with no neighbouring town, so rooms there run higher than anywhere else in this PDF and book out first; Alice Springs is the cheaper base if you drive the Red Centre instead.

Cairns

hostel AUD 25 to 40 **mid AUD 130 to 200** **comfort AUD 300+**

The Esplanade and city centre put the lagoon and the marina within walking distance. Palm Cove and Port Douglas, 30 to 60 minutes north, suit a beach-resort feel. The Stay22 hotel map for Cairns shows what is free on your dates.

Alice Springs

hostel AUD 30 to 40 **mid AUD 150 to 200** **comfort AUD 300+**

The outback hub for Larapinta walkers and anyone driving the 450 km to Uluru. Pick a room with a pool; afternoons here reach the mid-30s Celsius for much of the year. Compare dates on the Stay22 hotel map for Alice Springs.

Yulara (Uluru)

dorm or campsite cheapest **rooms book 3 months out**

The only lodging near the rock, run as one resort village. Cheaper options are dorm beds and campsites; rooms fill first in the May to September season.



CAIRNS ESPLANADE LAGOON AT DUSK

⚠ In Cairns, save the free nights for the end of your stay. Reef trips cancel in high wind, and a spare day is what saves the boat.

Uluru in winter means cold nights and warm days. Check that a room has heating and that a campsite has a hard-sided option.

05

Routes and itineraries

Eight trips by time and budget, a map of the 21-day east coast loop, and that loop worked out day by day.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Pick your trip 27

The east coast loop, as a map 28

The 21-day route, day by day 29

Pick your trip

time, budget, style · eight paths, per person unless noted · excluding international flights

Time and budget decide the route before any list of places does. Three weeks fits the east coast, two weeks fits Sydney plus the Red Centre, and four weeks or more is the only way to pair the coast with Melbourne or the Centre. Totals use the daily rates on page 32.

SOLO · 21D · BACKPACKER

East coast, Sydney to Cairns

AUD 2,500 · dorms, shared sailing

- Sydney 5, Byron Bay 3
- Whitsundays 5, Cairns 8

COUPLE · 21D · MID

East coast, Sydney to Cairns

AUD 5,700 each · double rooms

- Sydney 5, Byron Bay 3
- Whitsundays 5, Cairns 8

COUPLE · 21D · MID

Sydney, Melbourne, Tasmania

AUD 5,700 each · hire car

- Sydney 6, Melbourne 5, Great Ocean Road 2
- Tasmania 8 by car, Hobart to Cradle

SHORT-HAUL · 14D · MID

Sydney and the Red Centre

AUD 3,800 each · one internal flight each way

- Sydney 7, Uluru 3
- Alice Springs or Cairns 4

COUPLE · 28D · CAMPER

Sydney to Cairns by campervan

about AUD 11,000 for two · less with a relocation leg

- Hire, fuel and caravan parks
- K'gari and the reef on the way

DIVER · 10D · MID

Cairns and a reef liveaboard

about AUD 4,200 each · liveaboard included

- Cairns 4, Ribbon Reefs 3 to 4
- Port Douglas 2

WORKING HOLIDAY · 6 MONTHS+

City base, regional farm work

arrive with about AUD 5,000 · see page 33

- Sydney or Melbourne first month
- 88 regional days for a second year

COUPLE · 28D · MID

East coast, Red Centre and Melbourne

AUD 7,600 each · four flights

- The 21-day route plus Uluru 3
- Melbourne 3 and the Great Ocean Road

READ ON

Full day-by-day versions are online: the 14-day route, the 21-day route and the 28-day route.

The east coast loop, as a map

Sydney north to Cairns · two flights, one shuttle and one coach or flight

The loop is 2,400 km north to south and uses planes for the long jumps. Sydney to Byron Bay is a 1h30 flight plus a shuttle, Byron to the Whitsundays is a shuttle to Brisbane and a two-hour flight, and Airlie Beach to Cairns is about nine hours by coach or one short flight. Book the Whitsundays flight early; it has fewer daily departures than the Sydney to Brisbane trunk route.



The 21-day route, day by day

Sydney, Byron Bay, Whitsundays, Cairns · spare days sit where weather bites

1-2	Sydney	Land, Circular Quay, Opera House forecourt, the Rocks, the free bridge walkway.
3	Sydney	Bondi to Coogee coastal walk, about 6 km, ocean pools on the way.
4	Blue Mountains	Train from Central, Three Sisters and an escarpment walk, back by evening.
5	Sydney	Manly ferry or Royal National Park; a free day to absorb jet lag or a rainy forecast.
6	To Byron Bay	Morning flight to the Gold Coast or Ballina, shuttle in, beach at sunset.
7-8	Byron Bay	Lighthouse walk at sunrise, a surf lesson, then Julian Rocks snorkel or a Lamington day.
9	To Airlie Beach	Shuttle to Brisbane, flight to Proserpine, then the lagoon and an early night.
10-12	Whitsundays	Two-night sailing trip, Whitehaven Beach and Hill Inlet, snorkel stops on the way.
13	Airlie Beach	Buffer day for a weather delay; otherwise laundry, sleep and a lagoon swim.
14	To Cairns	Coach (about 9 hours) or a short flight; evening on the Esplanade.
15-16	Cairns	Outer reef day boat on day 15; Kuranda rail and Skyrail on day 16.
17-18	Daintree	Hire car north, cable ferry, a wildlife cruise and a night at Cape Tribulation.
19	Tablelands	Josephine and Millaa Millaa Falls, a swim and a late return to Cairns.

MORE ON THE SITE

The 21-day route page has maps and swaps, such as K'gari in place of Byron, and the 28-day route adds the Red Centre.

Tours worth booking

top-rated local operators, filtered to group trips, sorted toward backpacker prices

These are live, top-rated tours across the main bases, filtered to independent group trips and sorted toward the cheaper end. Match them to the route on the previous pages, and book the few that need a boat, a guide, or a permit ahead of time.

Flying Fox Experience, Thousands of Australia's Largest Bat

from 57 USD
5.0 (124 reviews)
2.5 hours
Sydney

Yarra River Waterbike Tour

from 70 USD
5.0 (23 reviews)
1.5 hours
Melbourne

Ancient Egypt Night Tour

from 70 USD
5.0 (16 reviews)
1.5 hours
Cairns & the Tropical North

Whitsunday Crocodile Safari

from 106 USD
4.8 (384 reviews)
6 hours
The Whitsundays

Segway the FULL base of Uluru

from 146 USD
4.9 (499 reviews)
5 hours
Uluru

WANDER BYRON Guided Sunrise Tours to Cape Byron

from 49 USD
5.0 (36 reviews)
2 hours
Byron Bay

Live Viator tours, prices captured October 2026, ratings from verified bookings. Tap a card to book. Some links earn Pack Lightly a commission at no extra cost.

06

When to go, what it costs

Weather by region, a day itemized at three travel styles, and the numbers behind a working-holiday year.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Weather by region 32

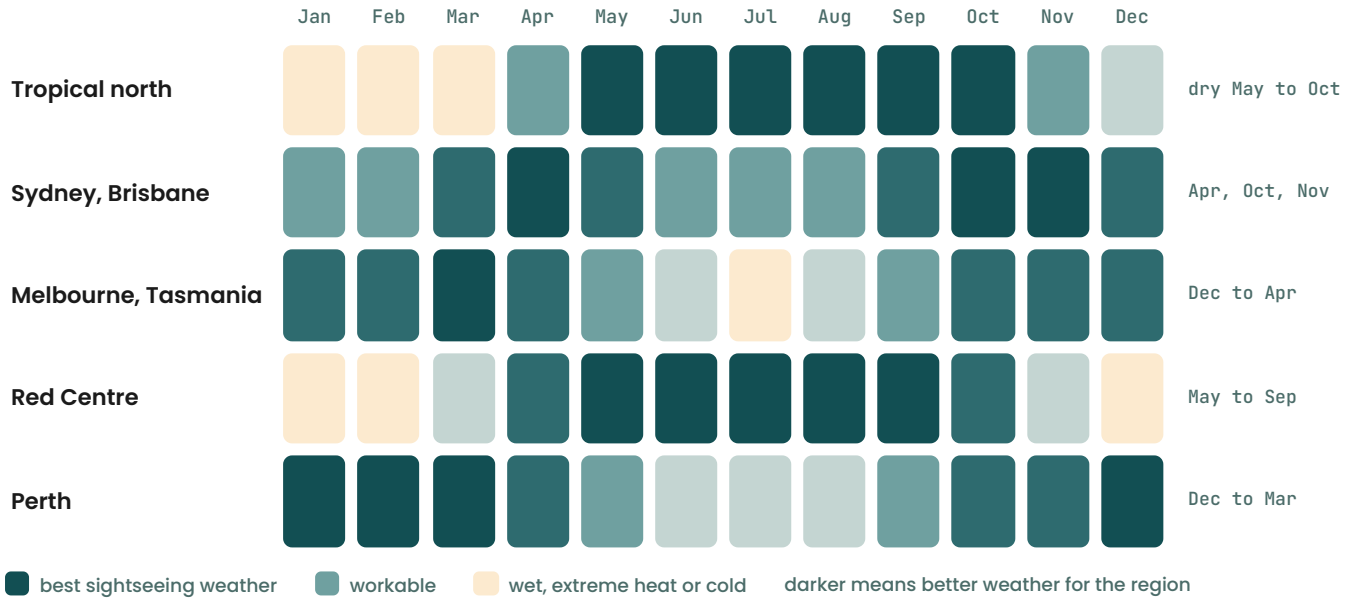
What a day really costs 33

Working-holiday money 34

Weather by region

five regions, one calendar · seasons are inverted against Europe and North America

No single month is best everywhere. The tropical north is dry from May to October and wet, hot and stinger-prone from roughly November to April. The south is the reverse: Melbourne and Tasmania peak from December to March and turn cold in July. The Red Centre is a winter destination, with warm days and cold nights from May to September and 40C summers that close walks. Pick the coast first, then the month.



pattern: regional climate zones, summarized from the Pack Lightly best-time page for Australia · 2026-10

STINGER SEASON
Nov-May
tropical north, suits supplied

WHALE WATCHING
Jun-Nov
east coast, Hervey Bay Jul-Nov

WHALE SHARKS
Mar-Jul
Ningaloo, western coast

PEAK PRICES
Dec-Jan
plus Easter, July, late Sep

06

KEEP READING The best time to visit page and the Best Time to Travel tool go region by region and month by month.

What a day costs

three travel styles · AUD, 2026 prices · printed the way the day spends it

The budget tool puts a day at 80 USD for a backpacker, 180 for mid-range and 400 for comfort, roughly AUD 120, 270 and 600. Here is a day itemized for each, with the share of long-distance legs built in, since those are where Australian budgets leak. Beds take the biggest slice at every level, and flights the second.

A DAY IN AUSTRALIA

* backpacker *

hostel dorm bed	50.00
breakfast, groceries	8.00
lunch, pie or sandwich	12.00
dinner cooked at the hostel	15.00
local transport	8.00
coffee and snacks	7.00
beach or coastal walk	0.00
share of long-distance legs	20.00

TOTAL / DAY ~120 AUD

budget tool: 80 USD/day · 2026-10

A DAY IN AUSTRALIA

* standard *

mid-range double room, half	110.00
cafe breakfast	22.00
lunch	20.00
pub dinner and a beer	40.00
local transport	10.00
one paid activity, shared	45.00
coffee and a snack	8.00
share of long-distance legs	15.00

TOTAL / DAY ~270 AUD

budget tool: 180 USD/day · 2026-10

A DAY IN AUSTRALIA

* comfort *

comfort room, half	220.00
hotel breakfast	30.00
restaurant lunch	45.00
dinner with wine	110.00
reef or tour day, shared	120.00
taxis and transfers	40.00
drinks	35.00

TOTAL / DAY ~600 AUD

budget tool: 400 USD/day · 2026-10

FLAT WHITE
~AUD 5
cafe, city

CAFE BREAKFAST
~AUD 22
eggs and toast, mid-range

PUB PINT
~AUD 10
alcohol is dear

PUB MAIN
~AUD 30
schnitzel or steak

Run the same numbers for your own dates, group size and currency in the free budget calculator.

Open the Budget Calculator

Working-holiday money

subclass 417 and 462 · tax, farm work, first-month costs · confirm on the official visa pages

A working-holiday visa is the cheapest way to spend a year in Australia, and the cost sits in the first six weeks. Most travellers hold subclass 417 (Working Holiday) or 462 (Work and Holiday), which allow up to a year of work with no more than six months at one employer. The usual age limit is 30, raised to 35 for several passports, so check yours. Rules, fees and age limits change; confirm them on the Department of Home Affairs visa pages before applying.

ITEM	NUMBER	WHAT IT MEANS
Income tax, first AUD 45,000	15%	Working-holiday-maker rate; higher rates apply above that threshold.
Casual loading	25% on base pay	Casual staff get a loading in place of paid leave. Check the award for the job.
Time with one employer	6 months	The usual cap per employer on these visas.
Regional work for a second year	88 days	Specified work in regional areas; 179 days for a third year.
Start-up funds	about AUD 5,000	A common visa requirement and a realistic buffer for the first weeks.
Share-house room, Sydney or Melbourne	AUD 250 to 400 a week	Close to a dorm-bed price per night, with a kitchen and a longer lease; see page 23.

figures are 2026 planning values: confirm tax, wage and visa details with the Australian Taxation Office and Fair Work before relying on them

THE FIRST SIX WEEKS, IN ORDER

- [ ] Apply for the visa online before you fly, then keep the grant letter on your phone.
- [ ] Request a tax file number as soon as you land, because employers withhold at a higher rate without one.
- [ ] Open an Australian bank account in your first weeks, using your passport and local address.
- [ ] Use a hostel as base for the first two weeks, then move to a share house once you have a job.

⚠ Do not pay a fee for a promised farm job, or accept pay below the legal minimum. Cash-in-hand work offers no tax record and no protection.

Pension contributions (superannuation) built up during the stay can be claimed when you leave Australia. Keep your payslips.

THE LONG VERSION

The Visa Checker covers entry rules for tourist stays, and the Australia ETA page covers the visitor permit.

07

Practical

The entry permit, the booking order, money, signal gaps and health. The boring parts you read once and then stop thinking about.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Book in this order 36

Money and transport 37

Bed, bag, signal 38

Health basics 39

Book in this order

one permit, three early bookings · everything else on the ground

Entry is a digital permit, not a visa. Most passports apply for an ETA (subclass 601) in the official Australian ETA app, which carries a AUD 20 service charge and allows stays of up to 90 days per visit, and EU passports use the free eVisitor instead. Use the official app only, since look-alike sites charge more. Keep the passport valid for six months as the safe rule. Then lock in four things, in this order.

10 wk before

Flights

Book the international fare first, then the internal legs. The Whitsundays and Cairns routes have the fewest daily departures, so those sell out before the Sydney to Brisbane trunk route does.

Compare fares on Skyscanner

6-8 wk before

Sailing, reef days and the beds around them

Shared Whitsunday sailing trips and outer-reef boats fill in the dry season. Book the trip first, then the nights on either side of it.

Book Airlie Beach on Stay22

2 wk before

ETA or eVisitor

Approval is usually quick, but a delay is cheaper to absorb two weeks out than at the airport check-in desk. Everything about the permit sits on the ETA page.

Read the ETA page

1 wk before

eSIM and insurance

Install the eSIM before departure. Buy trip cover that includes the reef, diving and any adventure sports you plan, because hospital bills for visitors without cover run into thousands of dollars.

Set up a Saily eSIM

Declare food, plant material and used outdoor gear on arrival. Boots with soil on them get inspected, and on-the-spot biosecurity fines run to hundreds of dollars.

Tell your bank the dates. Card tap is accepted nearly everywhere, and a blocked card in Cairns costs more than a missed phone call.

Money and transport

card tap nearly everywhere · planes for the long legs, tap-on transit in cities

Card tap works almost everywhere, from city cafes to country pubs, and cash is rarely needed. Some small businesses add a card surcharge of a percent or two. Tipping is not expected in Australia; rounding up or adding around 10 percent for good restaurant service is a courtesy. GST of 10 percent is already in the sticker price, and visitors can claim it back on goods worth AUD 300 or more from one business, bought within 60 days of departure, through the Tourist Refund Scheme.

ITEM	BACKPACKER	MID	COMFORT
Bed: dorm / double room, per night	AUD 50	AUD 220	AUD 440
Lunch	AUD 12	AUD 20	AUD 45
Dinner	AUD 15	AUD 40	AUD 110
Local transport, per day	AUD 8	AUD 10	AUD 40
One paid activity, per day	AUD 0	AUD 45	AUD 120

2026 planning values, derived from the day-cost receipts on page 32

TRANSPORT: WHAT BEATS WHAT

Past about 1,500 km, fly (page 19). In Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, tap on and off with a contactless card or a city transit card; fares are capped each day, so a day of ferries and trains tops out. Long-distance coaches link the east coast cheaply but slowly, and trains are a scenic option rather than a fast one. A hire car makes sense for the Great Ocean Road, the Daintree and Tasmania, and rideshare apps cover the cities.

Toll roads around Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane are cashless. A hire company will bill the tolls plus an admin fee, so ask before you take a motorway.

Distances look short on a map and are not. A 250 km drive in the outback takes three hours with no fuel stop on the way.

ON THE WEBSITE The Australia budget page and the flight tips page go deeper on money and fares.

Bed, bag, signal

hostel and hotel beds · packing for sun, boats and cold nights · eSIM and the coverage gaps

BED

For hostels, hotels and apartments, the Stay22 hotel map compares prices across booking sites on one screen and flags free-cancellation rates. Hostels run 25 to 70 AUD a night depending on the city, and a private room in a hostel is often the best-value private bed in expensive stops such as Sydney and Byron Bay. Check the lock-in and linen policy before booking a shared dorm.

BAG: THE THREE-WEEK EAST COAST LIST

- [ ] A long-sleeved rash vest: sun and stinger protection on reef trips, and a way to skip sunscreen in the water
- [ ] SPF 50 or higher, a broad-brimmed hat and sunglasses; the UV index reaches 11 or more in summer
- [ ] A light rain layer plus a warm layer for southern evenings, Tasmania and Red Centre nights
- [ ] Closed walking shoes for bush tracks, and sandals for the beach (thongs, locally)
- [ ] Insect repellent for mosquitoes in the north; a fly net for the Red Centre from October to April
- [ ] A refillable water bottle of at least one litre, since refill stations are common in towns
- [ ] A type I plug adapter, the angled three-pin socket used in Australia
- [ ] A soft bag that meets the 7 kg carry-on rule on low-cost domestic fares
- [ ] A dry bag for sailing and reef days, and motion-sickness tablets for boats

Signal. Install the eSIM before departure. Ten gigabytes covers three weeks of maps and messaging, twenty if you stream video. Coverage fades fast off the coast: expect gaps on long outback stretches, parts of the Daintree and between Alice Springs and Uluru, so download offline maps before leaving a town. Compare plans on Airalo's Australia eSIM, or size the data first in the Mobile Data and eSIM Calculator.

Set up a Saily eSIM

07

MORE DETAIL The 21-day packing list, the dress code page and the SIM and eSIM page have the long versions.

Health basics

no required vaccines for most arrivals · sun, heat and insurance are the real risks

Australia requires no mandatory vaccinations for most arrivals, although travellers coming from yellow-fever risk countries need a certificate. Routine vaccines are the standard clinic recommendation. The real everyday risks are sun and heat, mosquito-borne illness in the tropical north (Ross River virus and dengue occur in parts of Queensland), and a hospital bill. Public healthcare is not free for most visitors: a few countries have limited reciprocal agreements, and none covers repatriation or private care.

PRACTICAL BASICS

- [ ] Tap water is safe to drink in cities and towns across the country.
- [ ] Sun: reapply SPF every two hours and avoid the open between 11am and 3pm in summer.
- [ ] Mosquitoes: use repellent at dawn and dusk in the tropical north, and stay in screened rooms.
- [ ] Pharmacies, called chemists, stock the basics, and most towns have a medical centre.
- [ ] Insurance: buy cover that includes your reef, dive and adventure activities before you fly.

Compare cover side by side, including medical limits, dive cover and gear, before you pick a policy.

Open the Insurance Comparison

07

WORTH A READ

The vaccinations page and the Australia travel insurance page have the detail.

08

Safe and smart

Sun, stingers, crocodiles and outback roads: the rules that matter, the etiquette around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land, and the numbers and slang to know.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Sun, stingers and wildlife 41

Etiquette and respect for country 42

Emergency numbers and slang 43

Sun, stingers and wildlife

sun, rips and roads hurt more visitors than animals do

Skip the shark panic. Most incidents involving visitors are sunburn, rips and tired drivers, not wildlife, and most wildlife risk is managed by reading a sign and taking it literally. The rules below cover the water, the land and the road, and two of them carry a season: stinger season in the tropical north runs roughly November to May, and crocodiles live in tropical rivers, estuaries and some beaches all year.

IN AND NEAR THE WATER

Rips

Swim between the red and yellow flags, where lifeguards watch. If caught in a rip, float and signal, or swim parallel to the beach before heading in.

Box jellyfish and Irukandji, Nov to May

Wear a stinger suit in the tropical north and swim only inside netted enclosures. For a sting, pour vinegar on it and call 000.

Saltwater crocodiles

If a sign warns of crocodiles, do not swim, and do not trust the lack of a sign. Stay back from the water's edge, never camp at the bank and never clean fish there.

ON LAND AND ON THE ROAD

UV and heat

The UV index reaches 11 or more in summer. Use SPF 50 or higher, a hat and a shirt, and stay out of the open from 11am to 3pm.

Kangaroo hours

Kangaroos move at dawn and dusk and hit cars hard. Avoid driving outside towns after dark, and slow down on country roads at either end of the day.

Outback driving

Tell someone your route, carry extra water and a spare tyre, and fill the tank at every roadhouse. If the car breaks down, stay with it.

Snakes and spiders

Rarely a problem if you wear closed shoes in the bush and step on logs, not over them. After a snake bite, apply a pressure bandage and call 000.

08

SEE ALSO The Australia safety page and the Travel Safety Map cover scams and regional risk.

Etiquette and respect for country

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land, pub rounds and rules that carry fines

Uluru is the clearest example. Since 26 October 2019 the climb has been closed at the request of the Anangu, the Aboriginal owners, and the 10.6 km base walk replaced it. The same logic applies across the country: sacred sites are signed, photography is limited at some of them, and the guides who explain country are often Aboriginal themselves. A Cape Byron Aboriginal tour, for example, lists from about 53 USD for 90 minutes (Viator, 2026-10). Buy art from community-run art centres where possible, and ask before photographing people.

Do

- Obey signs and closures at cultural sites, and stay on marked tracks
- Take your turn buying a round (a "shout") if you drink with a group at a pub
- Slip, slop, slap: put on sunscreen, a hat and a shirt before you walk out
- Declare food and outdoor gear on arrival, and carry your litter out
- Tip for good restaurant service if you wish; it is a courtesy, not a rule

Do not

- Climb Uluru, or photograph signed sacred sites on the base walk
- Swim outside the flags, or where a sign warns of crocodiles or stingers
- Feed dingoes, kangaroos or quokkas; fines apply and the animals suffer
- Drive after drinking: the limit is 0.05 percent and random breath tests are routine
- Camp outside signed sites, or leave rubbish at a beach or bush camp

08

DIG IN The culture and etiquette page and the Uluru sacred sites page cover customs and site rules.

Emergency numbers and Aussie slang

save the numbers now · the slang is colour, English works everywhere

POLICE, FIRE, AMBULANCE
000
free from any phone, nationwide

ANY MOBILE PHONE
112
also reaches emergency services

POLICE, NON-URGENT
131 444
theft reports, lost property

POISONS INFORMATION
13 11 26
bites, stings, swallowed items

STORM AND FLOOD HELP (SES)
132 500
cyclone and flood season, north

LIFELINE CRISIS SUPPORT
13 11 14
24 hours, free

EIGHT SLANG WORDS YOU WILL HEAR DAILY

SLANG	MEANS	NOTES
arvo	afternoon	"See you this arvo."
servo	petrol station	fill up at every one in the outback
esky	cooler box	a camper essential
thongs	flip-flops	not underwear
bottle-o	bottle shop	where take-home alcohol is sold
ute	pick-up truck	common on country roads
heaps	a lot	"Thanks heaps."
shout	buy a round	take your turn

Save your accommodation address offline before any remote leg. Mobile coverage disappears faster than the road does.

English is the working language everywhere, so slang is flavour and not a requirement. "No worries" covers thanks, sorry and fine.

09

Tools and reference

The live tools behind these numbers, the cut-out cards for your wallet, and the dated sources for every figure.

IN THIS CHAPTER

Take the live tools with you 45

Print cards: cut, fold, take 46

Sources and methodology 48

Take the live tools with you

scan to open · data updates after this PDF was printed

This PDF is a snapshot, and the tools behind it keep updating. Scan a code or type the short address. Each one opens on the same Australia data the pages above were built from.



Trip Budget Calculator

Australia: 80 USD a day backpacker, 400 USD a day luxury.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/budget-calculator/



Country Map

Every stop in this PDF mapped, from Sydney to Cairns and Uluru.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/country-map/



Best Time to Travel

Best: May, Sep, Oct. Month-by-month weather for 140+ countries.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/best-travel-time-worldmap/



Visa Checker

Australia: ETA or eVisitor, up to 90 days a visit.

pack-lightly.com/
tool/visa-checker/

Print cards: cut, fold, take

print at 100% scale · credit-card size, 85 x 54 mm

Print this page on A4 or US Letter at 100 percent (no fit-to-page), cut along the dashed lines, and the two cards live in your wallet for the trip. The form fields are interactive in Acrobat and iOS Preview if you would rather type than write.

AUSSIE SLANG · ESSENTIALS

arvo	afternoon
servo	petrol station
esky	cooler box
thongs	flip-flops
bottle-o	bottle shop
ute	pick-up truck
heaps	a lot
shout	buy a round

pack-lightly.com

EMERGENCY · AUSTRALIA

Police, fire, ambulance	000
Police, non-urgent	131 444
Poisons Information	13 11 26
Storm and flood (SES)	132 500

My accommodation: _____

Address: _____

Insurance #: _____

Left card front, right card back: print double-sided on the short edge and they fold into one.

Lost the PDF, kept the card? The QR opens the live Australia hub with every page this PDF links to, plus updates published after this edition went to print.

pack-lightly.com/australia/

Photograph both cards before you cut. A phone copy of the emergency card still works when the wallet stays at your accommodation.

Write your accommodation's name and address on the back before remote legs. Coach drivers and taxi drivers read it in one glance.

Image credits

every photo, its author and license

All location, food and wildlife photographs come from Wikimedia Commons. Each is reused under the Creative Commons or public-domain license noted below, with attribution to the photographer. Under CC BY-SA, this list and any reuse carry the same share-alike terms. Click any title to open the original file on Commons.

1. **4wd on 75 mile beach k**. Travelstine, CC BY-SA 4.0.
2. **abell point marina**. eyeintim, CC BY 2.0.
3. **australia cover**. Dietmar Rabich, CC BY-SA 4.0.
4. **cairns esplanade lagoon**. Chris Olszewski, CC BY-SA 4.0.
5. **cape byron lighthouse above the pacific**. Maksym Kozlenko, CC BY-SA 4.0.
6. **cape byron lighthouse**. Bex Walton from London, England, CC BY 2.0.
7. **cottesloe beach**. -wuppertaler, CC BY 4.0.
8. **daintree rainforest meeting the beach**. John Robert McPherson, CC BY-SA 4.0.
9. **daintree rainforest meeting the beach**. Paul Holloway from Birmingham, United Kingdom, CC BY-SA 2.0.
10. **dove lake and cradle mountain**. Karora, Public domain.
11. **great barrier reef**. Christo.j.brown, CC BY-SA 4.0.
12. **great ocean road near apollo bay**. Pavel Špindler, CC BY 3.0.
13. **hill inlet and whitehaven beach**. Albyontour, CC BY-SA 4.0.
14. **kata tjuta domes in late light**. JayGoOz, CC BY-SA 4.0.
15. **manly ferry crossing sydney harbour**. Timovchinnikov, CC BY-SA 4.0.
16. **melbourne laneway street art**. Bernard Spragg. NZ from Christchurch, New Zealand, CC0.
17. **quokka on rottnest island**. Mark Gillow, CC BY 2.0.
18. **red desert road toward kings canyon**. Toby Hudson, CC BY-SA 3.0.
19. **snorkeller over coral**. Toby Hudson, CC BY-SA 3.0.
20. **surry hills terrace street sydney**. Chris Olszewski, CC BY-SA 4.0.
21. **sydney harbour bridge**. Benh LIEU SONG (Flickr), CC BY-SA 4.0.
22. **sydney opera house**. Kgbo, CC BY-SA 4.0.
23. **twelve apostles**. Dietmar Rabich, CC BY-SA 4.0.
24. **twelve apostles limestone stacks**. Migo Santos, CC BY 3.0.
25. **uluru from the sunrise viewing area**. Dietmar Rabich, CC BY-SA 4.0.
26. **whitehaven beach**. Hush Neo, CC BY-SA 4.0.
27. **whitsunday islands**. Binskip Inskip, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Tour data and prices: Viator Partner API, captured July 2026. Author portrait and brand marks: Pack Lightly.

Sources and methodology

every figure traces to a dated source or is labelled a planning range



WRITTEN BY

Wouter van Kemenade

Founder of the Pack Lightly platform, with a background in performance marketing and data. Price and fare ranges in this edition are labelled as planning ranges; the next edition flags any figure that moved more than 15 percent.

SOURCES USED IN THIS EDITION

1. Daily budgets: Trip Budget Calculator data, 80, 180 and 400 USD a day, converted at about 1.5 AUD per USD, 2026-10.
2. Entry policy: Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, ETA (subclass 601) page, researched 2026-09-22; AUD 20 service charge, stays of up to three months per visit.
3. Scores: country-comparison tool, 2026-10; the Oceania average is New Zealand and Australia.
4. Tour prices: Viator Partner API, from-prices in USD, captured 2026-10-03.
5. Distances and travel times: road-atlas figures, rounded. Domestic fares, bed prices and fuel costs are 2026 planning ranges, not live rates.
6. Climate pattern: regional climate zones, summarized from the Australia best-time page.
7. Working-holiday, tax and wage figures: summarized from public Home Affairs, ATO and Fair Work guidance; confirm the current figures before applying.
8. Australia pages, retrieved 2026-10-03: hub · best places · beaches · islands · national parks

Methodology. Scores come from the country-comparison tool's eleven dimensions. This edition shows the seven that change a decision for Australia, next to the Oceania average of Australia and New Zealand. Budget figures come from the budget tool, climate verdicts from regional zones, and each carries its capture date where it appears.

What changed in edition 2026.10: first release of Australia on the v2 design standard. Next planned update: April 2027. Not covered here: Darwin and Kakadu, Adelaide and Kangaroo Island, Cape York and the Kimberley, Canberra.

Booking links. Links to Skyscanner, Stay22, 12Go, Saily and Airalo are affiliate links: a commission is paid at no extra cost to the reader. Tours and photo credits follow on the next pages.