

* Australia

Living in a country once described by one Australian Prime Minister as the "arse-end of the world" suggests that the inhabitants might be a little odd.

In fact Aussies believe that it is those unfortunate enough to live elsewhere who are "one brick short of a load" However outsiders are pretty well convinced you would need to be a little odd to actually live here. If you doubt it, they will cast your mind back to the last game of Aussie Rules Football you witnessed. This is the sport the Aussies call their ownwith pride.

Aussies do not go in for emotional displays of national flags and songs, except at sporting events. The groundswell of patriotic fervor that is periodically whipped up by the press and politicians is kept well concealed. There is no need to tell other Aussies how great the country is, they already know and who else is there worth convincing? At official functions a brave attempt is made to sing the national anthem, but as nobody knows the words except politicians, and most people consider them to be "scumbags"- few are really bothered. The national anthem of Australia "Advance Australia Fair" was chosen by the government after a competition. It defeated the much more upbeat "Waltzing Mathilda" since even a nation founded by convicts drew the line at a national anthem about a swagman who kills a sheep (a hanging offence) then avoids arrest by drowning himself in a billabong. Nethertheless at official occasions everyone will burst into a rousing rendition of "Waltzing Mathilda. After all no bloody polli is going to tell an Aussie what song to sing.

Competition between states is spirited naturally the State in which you live in, has the best beer the best places to make business and, by far most important the best sporting teams. Interstate rivalry is typified by the annual state of origin Rugby league battles between Queensland and New South Wales. By comparison, the Roman arena was a place for wimps, and if a Rugby league player is rendered temporarily insensible play continues regardless.

One nation of people that has a special place in the hearts of Aussies are the Kiwis, but only because, being so close, the Aussies can't ignore them on much as they would like to. The other, of course is Britain. Ever since Britain started dumping her undesirables on Australia she has been seen in a parental light. The first arrivals wore clothing emblazoned with POHME (prisoners of His Majesty in Exile) The fact that the English are still called "pommies"

today is not to be taken as an insult, well it is an insult, but an Aussie will only insult a friend so it does not count.

There was some economic pain when after centuries of preferential trading with Australia Britain turned to Europe but this led to no animosity towards the Brits. It was all down to the Pollies and every Aussie knows that politicians have no connection with real people and real issues

Anyway the oz economy is now zipping along helped by China and Japan wanting their ore.

Britain is no longer considered important. The best use it serves ..is to provide victims for the usually invincible Aussie cricket team.

In the 1950s and 60s the English media carried advertisements promoting immigration to Australia by way of an assisted passage. The typical Aussie man was portrayed as young, big, bronzed and spending all day at the beach. The Aussie woman was young shapely, bronzed and also spent all day at the beach. These advertisements lured many unsuspecting "Poms" to their doom. For their 10 quid fare they had to endure at least two years down under. During these two years many lost the will to return. Aussies were, of course, happy to see their trials of life portrayed as glamorous. Their attitude was that anybody stupid enough to fall for such a line deserved to live in Australia. Compassion has never been a strong point.

In the 1980's Australian television carried a government health campaign "Life be in on it" including a sort of Aussie anti-hero. His name was Norm. He was 30-40 years old and had a huge pot belly. He sat in front of the television all day watching sport. Beer in hand of course. Bronzed Aussies and Norms co-exist happily, sometimes in the same body, after all, all surf clubs serve beer.

Apart from the pseudo-intellectual "chardonnay set" Aussies nowadays seem to have little or no interest in an imageother than to be seen as a great sporting nation.

For Australians too much sport is never enough. What's more sport is about winning, none of this just taking part nonsense.

When the Olympics are on, most Aussie newspapers will have tables showing medals won per head of population, thus conclusively proving that they beat the Americans, statistically at least

Statistically, 40% of Aussies was born overseas, or at least one of their parents was. In addition to their global family links, at any given time about 1 million Australians are overseas and this is not just the ones on the beach in Bali. Apart from the ubiquitous backpackers, Aussies are

working in creative industries in London, teaching surfing in Biarritz, selling fajitas in Costa Rica, and many end up behind bars – cocktail, that is. The vast majority returns home eventually, enriched by their experience but also even more convinced that Oz is the place to live.

Australian broadsheets all have international sections, while television often with foreign items. There is a whole TV channel- the Special Broadcasting System (SBS) – devoted to “ethnic” programmes, where you can watch everything from news in Indonesian to documentaries about tractor factories in Uzbekistan . Admittedly , SBS does not have the same ratings as *Neighbours*.

Reality, totally uncontrollable is never far outside the suburban limits. Pompous traditions. laws, and authority cannot be seen important when at any time physical considerations arise that may override the situation.

Dorothea Mackellar's poem " My country".

Known to generations of Aussie school kids, illustrates the power of nature down under

I love a sun burnt country,
A land of sweeping plains
of rugged mountain ranges
of draughts and flooding rains
I love her far horizons
I love her jewel sea
Her beauty and her terror
The wide brown land for me.

How you dress is up to you. There are certain minimum standards, many pubs will have a notice saying "Must wear shirt, no thongs", in Australia thongs are not a formal skimpy underwear but cheap rubber sandals, or as we call them flip-flops.

The revelation that Monica Lewinsky showed Bill Clinton her thong caused confusion in Australia, as many concluded incorrectly that he was some sort of foot fetishist

Beer is also state based. so people in Perth will not touch “VB” (Victoria Beer) and Victorians do not give a 4× for a “Saran”, which is the west's amber nectar. Even the glasses have different names. in New South Wales they drink “toohey” out of a “middy” and in Queensland, its a “pot.” Hence the expression "two pot screamer" describes a woman who becomes animated on a very small amount of alcohol.

All Aussie kids are brought up on toast covered with vegemite a substance derived from Brewer's yeast, so that effectively prepares them for a life revolving around breweries.

Via their language, the Aussies demonstrate their individuality, their vigorous character, their directness and their lack of convention. It has taken years of hard "yakka" to become that relaxed.

*Compiled by Bob Parton using information from Authors ,Joseph Kenneth Hunt and Mike Taylor