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Australia

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Australia's historical context is highly influential on the makeup of its touristic identity and is inextricably linked to the nation it has become. The so-called discovery and subsequent violent colonization of Australia casts a major shadow over the country's past, and reconciliation with its indigenous peoples remains a highly contentious and perennially unresolved matter.

More recently, a renaissance to ensure genuine and long-lasting reconciliation with its indigenous peoples has occurred, spurred by the Australian government's apology in 2008 in which then-Prime Minister Kevin Rudd acknowledged, "The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future" (Australian Government, 2008). One of the upshots of the apology has been a renewed acknowledgment of Australian indigenous culture and heritage.

Australia's renowned multicultural diversity, now a feature of its tourism offering, is underscored by colonial links, first and foremost, to Great Britain, from where the majority of its early settlers were drawn. The British influence was fostered by the White Australia Policy, introduced in the early 1900s, actively discouraging migrants from outside Britain and at the very least, outside Europe. It wasn't until the dismantling of the White Australia Policy in the 1970s that the country's diversity took shape with migrant inflows from outside its traditional source countries. Since the 1970s, Australia's immigration and active humanitarian program has drawn migrants from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Today, growing numbers of first-generation Australians can lay claim to a multiplicity of languages, cultures, and cuisines.

Tourism Context

As a tourism destination, Australia is multidimensional, offering great diversity from the tropics of the Northern Territory and Queensland to the arid desert areas of Western Australia and the temperate Mediterranean climate of the states of New South Wales, Victoria, Australian Capital Territory, and South Australia to the cooler environs of its southernmost state, Tasmania. Australia's coastline is vast, meaning that the relationship between Australians and the sea is an intimate one, encompassing aspects of both social and economic life. This is especially so on the eastern seaboard where the most heavily populated cities—Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane—are located.

For Tourism Australia, one of its more recent advertising campaigns, "There is nothing like Australia," sought to command a reputation of the country as a truly unique destination. In particular, this campaign positions Australia as a sophisticated, forward-looking, wholesome, and culturally diverse destination to visit. This is a far cry from past campaigns such as, "Where the bloody hell are you?" that played to hackneyed images of the country as an outback, sun, sand, and sea experience alongside ubiquitous icons, including the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Sydney Opera House, Great Barrier Reef, Uluru, and the outback.

In an effort to further portray Australia as a more sophisticated destination, independent of the outback, bush, and rainforest, the recent campaign "Restaurant Australia" promoted the quality and range of Australian food and wine as a key differentiator. Perhaps inspired by New Zealand's 100% pure campaign, Restaurant Australia showcased the cleanliness and diversity of Australia's produce as well as its prowess in fusing the cuisines of East and West.

In 2014–2015, the Australian tourism industry experienced unprecedented growth with total

international visitors reaching 6.6 million alongside associated expenditure of 33.4 billion Australian dollars. Much of the growth in international tourism has come from key Asian markets, including Thailand, China, and Hong Kong, while traditional markets such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand are maintaining their positions. According to Tourism Research Australia, the top five source countries for international visitation in the year ending June 2015 were New Zealand (1.2 million), China (864,000), United Kingdom (629,000), United States (544,000), and Japan (297,000).

In justifying its present destination branding efforts, Tourism Australia reports in *2020: New Research to Help Australian Tourism Reach Its Potential* that “most international markets have high expectations of Australia and, for those that visit, the good news is that Australia is delivering strongly—with the destination’s greatest drawcards identified as its world-class beauty, safe environment and welcoming people” (Tourism Australia, n.d.). In its strategic plan, *Tourism 2020*, Tourism Australia highlights six key development areas: (1) growing demand from Asia; (2) building competitive digital capability; (3) encouraging investment and implementing a regulatory reform agenda; (4) ensuring the tourism transport environment supports growth; (5) increasing the supply of labor, skills, and indigenous participation; and (6) building industry resilience, productivity, and quality.

Domestic tourism has experienced a similar growth trajectory with 83.2 million domestic overnight visitors spending 55.4 billion Australian dollars during the 2014–2015 fiscal year. Much domestic travel is concentrated in the eastern states, including New South Wales (15.9 billion Australian dollars), Queensland (13.7 million Australian dollars), and Victoria (11.6 billion Australian dollars). Australian domestic tourism continues to be challenged by value destinations in Southeast Asia (Thailand, Bali, Vietnam) and the Pacific Islands (Fiji, Vanuatu, Samoa). Furthermore, the growing capacity of low-cost carriers such as Air Asia, Scoot, and Jetstar continues to draw Australians away from domestic holidays toward short trips to the country’s Asian and Pacific Island neighbors. In 2014–2015, Australians traveled abroad in unprecedented numbers, with total departures reaching 9.2 million.

The growing deregulation of Australian aviation is expected to result in growing capacity for air travel between China and Australia. This has been enhanced by Australia’s free-trade agreement with China, which took effect in 2015 and encompasses investments and operational activities in the tourism sector. As a long-haul destination for Europeans and northern Asian tourists, growing Chinese airline capacity into Australia is expected to have major implications for international arrivals not just from China but also from Europe and North America. This is coupled with the continued prominence of Arabian Gulf airlines, including Emirates Airlines, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways, and Gulf Air, in airline routes from Europe to Australia.

The near-term prospects for the Australian tourism industry hinge largely on international economic and political undercurrents because of the country’s reliance on international aviation. If oil prices continue to fall as they did in 2015 and 2016, it presents the possibility of cheaper international airfares and increased long-haul travel to Australia. In addition, significant depreciation of the Australian dollar against the American dollar and the euro since 2013 provides further optimism for the Australian tourism sector. This is, however, counterposed against growing acts of terrorism in Europe and lingering conflicts in Syria and Afghanistan. Such external shocks can have major impacts on the propensity for international long-haul travel.

World Heritage Sites

Australia has 19 properties inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List; two other properties are on a tentative list for consideration as World Heritage sites. The Great Barrier Reef located adjacent to the country's northeastern coast in the state of Queensland is by far its most prominent natural site and unsurprisingly has been the mainstay tourism promotion to the country. However, recent concerns have been raised about the Queensland government's intentions to increase the focus on mining along the central Queensland coast. Conservationists and the tourism sector argue that this has potentially long-lasting negative impacts on the Great Barrier Reef.

Another natural World Heritage site that has captured visitor imagination is Uluru or Ayres Rock, located in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in central Australia. Affectionately referred to as the "Red Centre," Uluru embodies Australia's indigenous cultural landscapes. As for cultural heritage sites, the Sydney Opera House is undoubtedly the country's most internationally recognized built structure. Construction began in 1958, with the building opening in 1973. Located on Sydney Harbour and in close proximity to the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the Sydney Opera House serves as the centerpiece of Australia's image abroad.

Top Destinations

The most popular destinations in Australia for international tourists are mostly located along the southeastern seaboard. These include the capital cities of the country's most populated states: Sydney, the capital of New South Wales; Melbourne in the state of Victoria; and Brisbane, located in southeast Queensland. This is unsurprising given that the vast majority of international flights to Australia enter the country at one of the three gateway cities. Other popular cities are Darwin and the country's capital city, Canberra. Darwin is capital of the Northern Territory and gateway to its world-famous national parks, Kakadu and Litchfield National Parks. Canberra, located in the Australian Capital Territory, features several key attractions, including Australia's Parliament House, the Australian War Memorial, and the National Museum of Australia.

Other popular destinations are regional townships, including Port Douglas in Far North Queensland, Hobart in Tasmania, and Cessnock in the Hunter region of New South Wales. Two popular seaside resort areas are Airlie Beach, adjacent to Queensland's offshore Whitsunday Islands, and the central New South Wales town of Byron Bay, famous for its hippie and surfing roots and now home to a thriving tourism industry.

Latest Trends

The Australian tourism industry recorded around 6.6 million international tourists visiting Australia in the year ending June 2015, an increase of 7%. According to Tourism Research Australia (2015), the top five source markets for tourists to Australia are New Zealand (17.9%), China (11.7%), United Kingdom (10.1%), United States (8.1%), and Singapore (5.1%). Collectively, these source markets make up more than half of all arrivals to Australia.

According to Tourism Research Australia's *International Visitors in Australia: Year Ending June 2015*, Asia is a source of strong growth in international tourist arrivals. Over the previous 12 months to June 2015, arrivals from India had increased by 38%; China, 22%; Malaysia, 11%; and Singapore, 12.5%. Also, the share of total trip expenditure from Asia shows China increasing by 32% to 7 billion Australian dollars.

Total trip expenditure of international tourists at the end of June 2015 amounted to 33.4 billion Australian dollars. This was an increase from the previous period ending September 2014 of 10.4%. For the period ending June 2015, China accounted for 21%, followed by the United Kingdom, which made up 11.7%; the United States, 10%; New Zealand, 8.3%; and Japan, 4.3%.

The three key eastern seaboard states dominate much of the total trip expenditure of international tourists to June 2015, with New South Wales capturing 7.7 billion Australian dollars (up 10%), Victoria accounting for 5.7 billion Australian dollars (up 15%), and Queensland accruing 4.6 billion Australian dollars (up 15%).

For the year ending September 2014, Australia's top five regions by international visitors illustrate the dominance of gateway capital cities. Of the 6.6 million visitors, Sydney captured 47.2%, with Melbourne following at 31.9%; Brisbane, 15.9%; Gold Coast, 13.1%; and Perth, 12.1%. When it comes to international visitor nights, the top five regions are Sydney, accruing 28.7% of the 222.5 million room nights; followed by Melbourne, capturing 19.2% of visitations; Perth, 10%; Brisbane, 9.2%; and Gold Coast, 4.1%.

Future Prospects

Australia's proximity to Asia is arguably its greatest opportunity. Because of increasing affluence and a growing middle class in countries of the region, the propensity to undertake international travel is heightened. Coupled with the emergence of low-cost airlines and the likely increases in airline capacity between China and Australia, the Australian tourism sector is poised for long-term growth.

Australia's reputation as a clean, safe, and peaceful destination adds to the allure of a holiday in the country. Moreover, Australia's diverse tourism offerings enhance opportunities for repeat visitation. Indeed, the destination marketing tagline, "There is nothing like Australia," is intent on stamping in people's minds the country's reputation as a unique experience, far removed from the oversimplification of sun, sand, and sea to one that exemplifies culture, cuisine, and people.

Joseph M. Cheer and Irina Herrschner

See also [Backpacker Tourism](#); [Culinary Tourism](#); [Highway/Freeway System, Australia](#); [Melbourne, Australia](#); [Wine Tourism, New World Wines, Australia/New Zealand](#)

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