

## The Oz Experience

Victoria is the smallest of six states in the vast country of Australia; a country that is the most desolate (90% of Australia is uninhabited), yet the most urbanized (over half the population lives in the biggest five cities). Despite its size, tourists can enjoy the essence of Australia by visiting Victoria. Visitors will immediately notice the relaxed style and carefree people, who possess an entertaining dialect. Further, several unique animals can be found in the varied countryside. Moving away from the coast and towards the interior means traveling into the "bush" and then, at some arbitrary point, into the outback. There are also many opportunities for cultural events in Melbourne, the country's second biggest city.

I had spent three months in Dromana, Victoria, down the beach from Melbourne, as a student teacher. I quickly became accustomed to the "no worries" lifestyle. In my American teaching experiences, a handful of teachers would go out for drinks after school on Friday afternoon. However, Friday afternoon in Dromana was an all faculty occasion. My cooperating teacher and I were in charge of the festivities and would come in early with slabs of beer covered by student work in case students questioned us. We really didn't need to be that sly as after school all the teachers drank in the faculty lounge as they assisted students with homework.

Pubs and drinking alcohol are certainly a big part of Australian life. Many restaurants are "bring your own" as customers arrive with previously purchased alcohol. Beer can be bought at drive-thrus much like hamburgers are purchased at McDonald's. Most Americans probably know of Fosters because of their advertising campaign in the US. However, each area has their own specialty beer in which the citizens take great pride in drinking. In Dromana it was Victoria Bitter, but other types such as Carlton Draught were popular in other areas.

In addition to what beer one drinks, what footy team one pulls for is of utmost importance. Relationships and marriages have been destroyed by this sport. The rabid footy fans have a comparable passion to that of Green Bay Packer fans. Although rugby, soccer and cricket are popular throughout Australia, footy rules in Victoria. Most of the 16 teams in the Aussie Footy League are located in Melbourne or the suburbs such as Essendon and Carlton.

The game is played on a large oval and includes constant running, passing, tackling and kicking. Time-outs are not given if someone is bleeding or knocked unconscious, rather the player is dragged out of the oval and is replaced by a substitute. The goal is to kick the ball, which is slightly bigger and rounder than a football in between two inner goals "on the fly" - in the air, without anyone touching it - to get six points. If an opponent touches the ball, or it is thrown, or kicked on the fly through the outer goals, it is only one point.



A footy game is a great place to pick up some Australian phrases. Many of the words and sayings are similar to the British, but others are distinct. The relationship to Britain is obvious due to Australia's history and noticeable nearly everywhere in Victoria. Besides the British slang, Aussies drive on the left side, the political and school systems are similar, Australia is still in the Commonwealth and, after a contentious debate, the Union Jack remains on the top, left corner of the Australian flag.

However, much of the Australian speech is different than the British. The pitch is more nasal and Australians often end statements by raising their voice as if asking a question. "No worries" indicates that everything is okay and has the same meaning as "not a drama". Similar in meaning is "Bob's your uncle", which indicates everything will be all right. A "shout" means to buy a round of drinks, which vary from pot (a glass), schooner (a big glass), jug (a bigger glass), stubbie (375ml bottle), bottle (a 750ml bottle) and slab (approximately a case). Several other words can be included to enhance sentences such as "heaps" (many), "fair bit" (some), "anklebiter" (young child), "rubber neck" (tourist), "oz" (Australia) and "dinki di" (real Australian).

The unique animals that inhabit the country match the uniqueness of the Aussie language. Kangaroos can be found in most habitable places outside the major cities. Playing a round of golf may include a kangaroo hopping about on the fairway. Koala bears can be found munching on the eucalyptus tree throughout the land. The leaves on the tree are actually a drug so the bears are usually doped up, which explains why they move so slowly.

In addition to the pubs, footy games, and rugged outdoors, there are many other cultural opportunities in Melbourne. The population of Melbourne is over three million when including its numerous suburbs. But, many of the attractions are located in the city center. The Yarra River runs through the city and there are many parks as well as the huge Royal Botanical Gardens. Nearby are historical buildings such as the Town Hall, City



Square, Princess' Theater and St. Paul's Cathedral. A large market in the center, Queen Victoria's Market, is a great place to shop. Also, the Rialto Towers contains an observation deck on the top floor, which can be used for an overview of the city.

Another popular activity in Victoria is gambling. The fairly new Crown Casino is located a few meters south of the Yarra and is an entertaining place even for people who do not gamble. The outside of the building

includes pillars that intermittently discharge balls of fire. Unfortunately, pigeons and other birds roost on these pillars and are often burnt alive. Despite the occasional burning of the birds, the casino is worth visiting.

The worst part about a trip to Victoria is the long flight. On the way there a passenger loses a day; it just vanishes, because the International Date Line is crossed. However, the trip is worth the long flight. Many adventure seekers and younger travelers backpack here because they are called by the rugged land. Some first-time travelers go to Australia because it is an English-speaking country that is easy to navigate. But any tourist who visits should have heaps of fun in Australia.