Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action

Country Overview & Packing Guidelines

Spring 2027

Country Overview

GENERAL INFORMATION

In size, Australia is slightly smaller than the 48 contiguous United States. Its population is estimated at over 26 million, with 86% of the population living along the coast. Most of the interior of the country is desert or semi-arid.

Australia is a “Commonwealth Realm,” referring to its status as a former British colony while still retaining the King of England as figurehead. It is a parliamentary democracy with a Prime Minister serving as Head of Government. The capital of Australia is Canberra, located in the Australian Capital Territory and surrounded by the state of New South Wales.



Australia is rich in natural resources. Agricultural products, particularly grains and wool, and minerals, including various metals, coal, and natural gas, constitute 65% of its total exports. The economy, however, is dominated by its services sector (68% of GDP), and only 8% of GDP is attributed to its agricultural and mining sectors.

CLIMATE AND GEOGRAPHY

The program is based in Byron Bay, in northern New South Wales, located about 500 miles north of Sydney and 130 miles south of Brisbane. It is a town of a little more than 9,000 residents, and a popular tourist destination for its beautiful coastline and hinterland, and its music and arts festivals.

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The area surrounding Byron Bay is a sub-tropical region, with moderate temperatures because of the effect of the ocean. The state of Tasmania is a field trip destination, which will be significantly colder, with lows possibly below freezing in the mountains. We also travel to the cities of Melbourne and Sydney, which have wide temperature fluctuations depending on the season. In short, in this program you're likely to experience a wide variety of weather, from hot to cold, from wet to dry, although most of the time the temperatures are likely to be moderate and pleasant. Still, come prepared for a variety of conditions.

[Byron Bay]: AVERAGE HIGH/LOW TEMPERATURES (°F)

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
82/70	82/69	80/67	76/63	72/59

SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC
72/58	74/61	76/64	80/67

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Local customs in Australia are similar to the US in many ways but different in some respects. Generally, it is acceptable for both men and women to shake hands upon meeting. Once well acquainted, two men may hug each other, two women may hug and/ or exchange a kiss on the cheek and a man and a woman may exchange a kiss on the cheek. Once people get to know you, it is not uncommon for them to tease you as part of a greeting, and so it is important not to take offence, and to try and develop a sense of humor towards friendly "banter". You may also have to get used to people being a bit more direct in their comments.

In Australia dress codes are generally very casual, with shorts and flip flops acceptable in most situations. In the cities, for business meetings, and at nights in good restaurants, hotels or clubs, a smarter standard of dress is often expected, including for men: a shirt with a collar, long pants and close-toed shoes; and for women: shoes or sandals. Shirts are required to be worn in taxis and all forms of public transport.

Australians are generally quite punctual people for being so laid back and casual in many regards. If a set time is agreed upon, it is expected that the time will be honored unless the person says "around…. o'clock". There is also a strong tradition of egalitarianism in Australia and a widespread distaste for classism and pretentiousness. You are expected to be modest about your achievements and to treat a cleaner or waiter with the same respect you would show the Prime Minister. You can address anyone, except Aboriginal elders, simply by their first names. For Aboriginal elders you preface their name with "Uncle" or "Auntie".

Some customs you may have to get used to are:

No eating or drinking (except for water) in classrooms, public transport, taxis and many shops.

No tipping (although some 'higher end' restaurants are beginning to introduce it).

Strong restrictions on where you can smoke

LOCAL DIET

SIT Study Abroad provides experiential learning opportunities where students become embedded in their host community. As such, we strive to accommodate serious food allergies where possible but simply cannot ensure that all dietary restrictions or non-medically mandated diets can be accommodated.

Students are encouraged to participate in the local food culture as a central aspect of daily life. By trying to replicate your diet at home you may miss out on an important part of your host culture. Due to the unique living and learning community central to all SIT programs, we cannot separate food and eating communally from the program experience. Please consider local diet seriously when selecting your program of choice. Your admissions counselor is a great resource in better understanding the local diet.

Australia is a very multi-cultural country with nearly 30% of its residents born overseas. Over 50% of people have at least one parent born overseas. The national diet is therefore very diverse. While on excursion, students will assist with meal preparations. In between excursions, students will be staying in apartments in Byron Bay with cooking facilities and will be responsible for preparing and paying for their own meals. When we have group meals on excursions, we always have a vegetarian or vegan option if needed.

Note: if you have special dietary needs, including allergies, please inform the office of Student Health, Safety & Wellbeing prior to the start of your program (studenthealth@sit.edu). We will advise you on realistic expectations about avoiding or incorporating certain foods within the program context.

MEAL PLANNING

Residential students are responsible for the majority of their meals and should plan accordingly. Meal planning becomes an exciting way to explore local markets, try new ingredients, and even cook with fellow students.

The estimated cost for meals not provided during the program is based on the cost of modestly eating out or buying groceries to prepare your own meals, when cooking facilities are available. If you plan on eating out regularly, you should budget more money. Exploring local food is one of the highlights of living abroad, so give yourself room to savor the experience.

Please remember to budget at least **US$2580** for your meals not provided during the semester. For a breakdown of your program's estimated out-of-pocket expenses, please see the table in the **Money** section of this document.

SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is essential to having a successful study abroad experience.

SIT recommends you do research prior to departure about the health, safety, and security specifics of the country(ies) you plan to visit. Consult the U.S. Department of State website and search their Countries and Areas Archive for international travel information and current travel advisories for each country. Search the Center for Disease Control Traveler's Health page to see travel health notices and vaccine requirements and recommendations for any country(ies) you plan to visit.

Consider your normal routines for maintaining your physical and mental health and wellbeing. How might your program impact your ability to continue these routines? With this in mind, SIT strongly recommends bringing a full semester's supply of prescription medication(s). Getting a prescription filled outside of one's home country can be difficult, if not impossible. Equally challenging is receiving medication from home by mail. Therefore, students should bring an entire semester's worth of medication with them. Students are also advised to bring several extra inhalers and/or Epi-pens if prescribed.

SIT recommends doing research ahead of time to stay up to date on It will be critical that you educate yourself about the potential health and safety hazards that may exist in your areas of travel and make informed decisions about what preventative measures to take prior to departure. You should also reference the Health, Access, and Identity information on your program's webpage.

If you have any questions, please reach out to the Student Health, Safety, & Wellbeing Team. Students are thoroughly briefed on safety considerations during in-country orientation and are updated throughout the semester if and when circumstances change. For information regarding safety and security, emergency communications, SIT policies, health and personal property insurance, and general program tips, please read the Safety, Security, and Health document and Student Handbook.

HOUSING

Students should expect to share a room with one or more students during orientation, while in Byron Bay, and while on excursions. Due to the popularity of the locations we stay at and visit on this program, single rooms for students are simply not viable due to space availability.

There are a range of accommodations during the semester, depending on location. Upon arrival, students have one night in a backpackers' hostel in Brisbane, where students stay in shared dorms. For the remainder of three-day orientation, you will be camping (two students per tent). When based in Byron Bay, you will be staying in apartments near the beach, with cooking facilities, sharing a room with a fellow student. For the various field trips throughout the semester, you will be staying in a range of places, including cabins, backpackers' hostels, and camping/tents. During the independent study period, students stay in a range of accommodations depending on their location. Some students explore 'homestay' opportunities during the IP period, guided by SIT staff, although homestays are not guaranteed (i.e. they depend on availability).

TRANSPORTATION

We will be using buses and large vans for most excursions and local transportation, and will travel by plane to Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmania.

COMMUNICATION

While you may want to be in regular communication with friends and family from home during the term abroad, please bear in mind that different time zones, unreliable phone lines, and changing program activities can complicate communication.

It's important to be clear with family and friends about your availability during the term. Many students recommend making an appointment to call home or to receive a call. You should also consider the impact of constant communication with friends and family at home on your cultural immersion.

Visit our Contact & Communication page for practices on program communication, emergency communication, and home institution communication.

PHONES AND INTERNET

Cell Phone Policy

As part of SIT's commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working cell phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls, including a data plan so that your phone is operational when you are away from wi-fi. If needed, during orientation SIT staff can guide students in purchasing a local SIM card and acquiring minutes for calls and texting. Failure to maintain a working phone capable of making and receiving calls/texts will be considered a conduct violation and a breach of our student code. A local SIM card is strongly encouraged (e.g. in case extended student-advisor phone calls are needed).

Telstra is generally considered to have the best “coverage” on our excursions, and a monthly plan including data is about USD 25.

You should let your family know that you may not have internet access during orientation for the first four days of the program and that there will be other periods during the semester when you will be out of internet and cell phone range. You should not make prior commitments to call people at set times until you arrive in Australia. Australia is 16 hours ahead of EST (November-March), and 14 hours ahead during Daylight Saving Time (April - October). Your family can always contact you in an emergency through SIT in Vermont. The SIT program center provides internet access during posted hours. Wireless internet is available free in your apartments in Byron Bay and at most of the other places we will stay, but it is advised to have sufficient mobile data for times when Wifi access is unavailable. There are several days during the semester when there is no phone and internet available.

MAILINGS

Unlike receiving a package here in the US, receiving a package at your program site is usually **expensive** and can be **problematic**. Customs agents must inspect all packages and you, as the recipient, are responsible for duty and storage fees. In addition, there are cases of items being lost in the mail or taking so long to reach the recipient that the recipient is nearly back in the US by the time the items are received. For these reasons, sending packages should be done only for emergency situations. Additionally, sending valuables is highly discouraged. Mailing prescription medication abroad is illegal.

For this program, **DHL, FedEx, UPS services are available in country**. Despite cheaper prices, reliance on the US Postal Service is not advised due to delays and unreliability. When given the option, it’s always a good idea to send packages certified and with a tracking number that allows the sender to track the package. Keep in mind that you may be traveling with the group when a letter or package arrives, so it is conceivable that you may not get a letter or parcel for up to six weeks after it is sent. Also, please make friends and relatives aware of the program finishing dates, as packages and letters that arrive after your departure cannot be forwarded or returned internationally due to security regulations.



If it is necessary for someone to send you mail then posted letters and packages should be sent to the following address:

Student Name
c/- Samuel Alexander and Helen Lamb
PO Box 739
Byron Bay
NSW 2481
Australia

MONEY

Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted in Australia. Make sure you bring a credit card for emergencies. ATMs are also available for Cirrus and Plus systems and are widely available. Withdrawing funds directly from ATMs is probably the best, safest and cheapest way to access and exchange money, as changing cash and travelers' checks in banks within Australia often incurs up to a $15.00 fee, and the exchange rate given at ATMs is almost always better than you'll get in the bank or money changers for cash or travelers' checks.

If using a debit and/or credit card, you should contact your bank and/or credit card companies regarding your travel plans. If you don't inform these companies that you will be away, they will often assume the card has been lost or stolen and will put an immediate hold on the card. You should also check on costs of withdrawal, as these costs vary and can sometimes be very expensive. Renewing and receiving reissued credit and debit cards while on the program will be an expensive and highly inconvenient process. Before you leave for your program, please check the expiration dates on your cards to ensure that they will not expire while you are abroad. It is also very important that you make photocopies of all your debit/credit card information and leave them with someone you trust in case your card(s) is/are lost or stolen. You will set up a local bank account in the first week of the program (SIT staff will guide you).

We suggest that you budget between **US $4800 to $5200**. You will need money for meals not provided by the program, travel to and from your ISP site, phone calls to researchers and photocopying materials. Minimum ISP/Internship expenses are US$200 but can range up to $1000.

The total amount needed varies greatly from project to project, depending on both the nature and location of the project. Projects closer to Byron Bay are generally cheaper than those further

away. If you are considering a project beyond the Byron region (if approved), you may need to allow up to $600 for the round-trip airfare, depending on the location.

To determine where you might fall in this range, please examine your spending habits during a typical semester at your home school and consider any exceptional expenditures you may have on the program, including travel costs for your planned project or a specific personal expense.

Check current exchange rates: http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/

Please budget approximately (US dollars):

Personal spending (from past student suggestions):	x 1000
Meals Not Provided	X 2580
Books, printing, supplies:	x 100
Up-front medical costs:	x 200
Potential ISP travel expenses:	x 800
Visa:	x 175 (estimate)
Estimated total:	x 4855

Please note that up-front medical costs can vary widely. Though you are completely covered by SIT's travel insurance BlueCross BlueShield, which you can read more about on our Participant Insurance page, you still may need to pay up-front for medical care and then file for reimbursement.

VISITORS AND FREE TIME

SIT strongly discourages and will not provide support for any visitors to students during the term, due to the rigorous nature of the program and the disruption that such visits cause in program flow and group dynamics. Students should be sure that relatives and friends are aware of this policy and that visits are scheduled for dates after the formal conclusion of the program. Students will not be excused from program components to attend to visitors. See the Attendance and Participation Policy.

If a visitor does come while a program is in progress, they must plan their own independent accommodations; SIT Study Abroad homestay families can accommodate only their assigned

student and, due to cultural and contractual understandings with SIT, should not be asked to host students' guests.

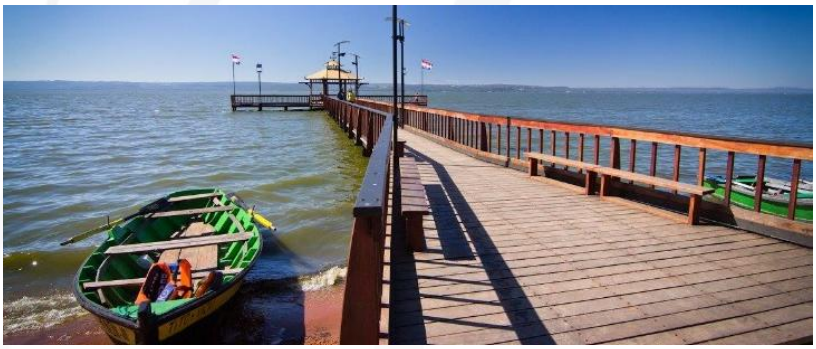
INDEPENDENT TRAVEL

Please read our full Independent Travel policy for our definition, guidelines and how to access our independent travel notification form. Please note that independent travel is only allowed during program free time and students will not be excused from program activities to travel. SIT is not responsible for any costs of student independent travel including logistics, preparations, cancelation fees, change fees, and any other costs associated with independent travel. We highly recommend you wait to book any independent travel until AFTER arriving on program and receiving the final academic schedule from your program.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP. Free time for pursuing an independent interest or hobby during the program will be limited. Your admissions counselor can advise you about particular interests you may have. For example, if you must keep in shape for your next athletic season, or if you play a musical instrument and want to know whether to bring it, we can help you to understand your schedule and any concerns or limitations that may exist.

CODE OF CONDUCT AND POLICIES

SIT maintains a Code of Conduct and clear institutional policies regarding student behavior through a commitment to mutual learning and respect for others. Visit the policy page for detailed policies around academic integrity, alcohol and drug use, anti-harassment and non-discrimination, attendance and participation, credit hours, equal education opportunities, grading, housing, independent travel, prohibited activities, religious holiday observance, sexual harassment and misconduct, and withdrawal among others.



Packing Guidelines

LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage significant distances on your own. Try to minimize both the number of bags and weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad. We recommend a small daypack as well as your travel bag/suitcase, which will also be useful for short excursions when on the program.

If carrying prescription medications, you should carry a letter from your doctor to prevent any concerns at customs or in transit. (Please see the "General Health Tips" section in the Safety, Security, and Health pre-departure document.)

Please check the current requirements of the Transportation Security Administration (http://www.tsa.gov) as well as those of the airline on which you are flying for domestic and international baggage restrictions.

You need to bring three bags in total. First, you should carry your belongings in a large backpack or a medium-sized suitcase (30"x20"x15" is an ideal size for a suitcase and is the maximum size allowed by many airlines). Second, inside your luggage, you also need to bring an empty, small fold-up carry bag that zips closed. You will need this to store any excess belongings while on excursions and on ISP/Internship. If you don't bring this, we won't be able to store stuff for you. Third, you must bring a small day pack. You can use this as your carry-on luggage. If you bring more than one large bag you may need to leave it at the airport on arrival as it may not fit in the program bus. If your suitcase is larger than the recommended size it may cause disruption to the group and we may not be able to accommodate it in the luggage trailer, resulting in you having to leave it at the airport. Our internal flights are with Virgin Airlines, with checked luggage allowance of 1 x 23kg, and carry on allowance of 8kg.

CLOTHING GUIDELINES

Plan to mostly dress casually. A long-sleeved shirt will come in handy for protection from insects and stinging plants during fieldwork. Generally, Australians dress as casually as Americans – jeans, shorts, tee shirts, swimsuits, and flip-flops (known by Aussies as "thongs"). But to get into some night clubs or bars, men may need a shirt with a collar and closed-toed shoes and women may need shoes or sandals. Most previous students recommend that you bring a few sets of nice clothes for evenings in the cities and Byron Bay. You may also need some good clothes for your internship depending on what organization you intern for. While we will be spending time

out in natural areas, camping, and going on hikes, much of the semester you will be in towns. You will need to pack efficiently but come prepared for various locations and temperatures.

EQUIPMENT

A sleeping bag is required. A medium sleeping bag is best (something that can handle temperatures down to 35 degrees). Tents and sleeping mats are provided when necessary for camping.

COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

You must bring a laptop computer. This computer will be your personal property and responsibility. Before leaving home, remember to back up your computer to the cloud or on a hard drive that you leave at home to safeguard all your data in case your computer is lost or stolen. It is recommended that you ensure your computer, smartphone, or other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft (SIT insurance does not cover personal property).

Because the program travels so much, it does not provide computers for student use. Wireless internet is available free at the apartments in Byron Bay, and most other accommodation places we stay at when we travel away from Byron. As a minimum, $100 should be adequate to cover your phone and data costs for the semester. We do, however, visit remote wilderness areas where there is no cellular coverage and so you should not expect to have internet access every day of the program. In all, there will be about 14 days during which you will have minimal or no internet access.

Assignments are usually typed in Word and submitted via email. Because you will not always have access to the internet it is important that you have word processing software on your computer. You cannot always rely on cloud-based software such as Google Docs.

Electric converters are generally not required for Australia, as most appliances like laptops and digital cameras should have 110-240v capabilities (and is marked as such on the power pack). An adapter plug to change the prong type for the outlet is necessary and can be purchased in Australia for about $10.

Please see the following website for information about electricity, voltage and electrical adapters. http://www.worldstandards.eu/electricity/.

GIFTS

As you might imagine, it is best to be prepared with a gift to offer your homestay family in gratitude for their hospitality and as a means to share a part of your culture with them. We

suggest one or two gifts that the whole family can enjoy. You may also wish to consider gifts for people outside your homestay family. Try to choose gifts that represent you or the part of the country and/or community you live in. Think about what your city, state, or local artisans produce. Draw upon your personal interests or hobbies for ideas. Pack a couple of small gifts for children, such as small games, bubbles, or a Frisbee. Even if your homestay family does not have small children, chances are that you will engage with children in your homestay community. Once you are on the program and learn more about the local culture, you will discover other ways to thank your family. Remember to bring pictures of your friends and family to share.

Former students have recommended calendars, picture books, postcards, music, or souvenirs from your college bookstore as gifts.

WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

Aside from some prescription medications, everything you need can be obtained in Australia at a reasonable cost but bring some shampoo, deodorant, toothpaste, sunburn protection (30+), sanitary supplies, etc. to get you through the first week at least. There are coin-operated washing machines at most places you will stay but Australians usually dry their clothes outside, so there may not always be dryers.

ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: https://studyabroad.sit.edu/admissions-aid/application-process/contact-a-former-student/.

Don’t miss the Packing List on the next page!

Packing List

These minimum packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director. Again, you will need to pack efficiently, but come prepared for various locations (from cities to campsites) and temperatures (from hot to cold).

Packing List sample:

GENERAL

- warm sweatshirt or fleece (bring both if you particularly feel the cold)
- 1 set warm long underwear (synthetics such as polypropylene are good)
- 7 pairs of socks
- 9 sets of underwear
- 7-9 shirts (of various thickness with at least two long sleeve)
- 2 - 3 pairs of shorts
- 1 pair of jeans or sweatpants
- 1 pair of lightweight long pants for hiking
- 1 good quality waterproof raincoat (essential for safety and comfort in cold weather)
- 1 or 2 swimming suits
- 1 pair of sandals (Tevas or Chacos are good)
- 1 hat to protect you from the sun
- 1 pair of shoes/boots for hiking (we only do about three half-day hikes and a bunch of shorter ones, but some of the trails we use are pretty rough and sometimes wet and muddy, and at times we may be walking in snow. So ensure you have appropriate footwear and attire for hiking.).

MORE FORMAL ATTIRE

- 2 sets of nice clothes for going out at night and ISP / Internship requirements
- 1 pair of shoes for going out

TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis (see the Safety, Security, and Health document for more information)
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa
- Any relevant vaccine records/documents

HEALTH/TOILETRIES

- Adequate supply of any medications you use regularly including birth control and the relevant prescriptions (drugs for use other than for medical purposes are strictly forbidden on your program and strict penalties are in effect)
- A list of any medications you are currently taking with the generic name of each (if there is one)
- Extra pair of glasses or contact lenses with solution
- Sunscreen

OTHER IMPORTANT ITEMS

- Visa or MasterCard credit card for emergencies
- 1 small headlamp flashlight
- 1 larger towel and 1 small camping towel
- 1 water bottle (1QT minimum)
- Sunglasses
- Sleeping bag
- Laptop computer
- USB drive (optional)
- A large notebook with a hard cover for taking lecture notes
- Students are encouraged to bring a **battery-operated carbon monoxide detector**

OPTIONAL

- Pajamas
- A camera
- A camping pillow