



COUNTRY

OVERVIEW

& PACKING

GUIDELINES

**Australia: Sustainability and Environmental Action**  
**Fall 2020**

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# COUNTRY OVERVIEW

## GENERAL INFORMATION

In size, Australia is slightly smaller than the 48 contiguous United States. Its population is estimated at over 24 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 Queen 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.

The area surrounding Byron Bay is a sub-tropical region, with very moderate temperatures because of the effect of the ocean. In Lismore, which is located a bit more inland, temperatures are more extreme than the average temperatures for Byron Bay. Tasmania will be significantly colder, with lows possibly below freezing in the mountains.

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

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY
82/69	82/69	80/67	77/64	70/59
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	
70/58	75/61	77/63	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 littering



- No tipping
- Sitting in the front seat with the taxi driver and engaging in conversation
- Strong restrictions on where you can smoke
- Always wearing a seatbelt in vehicles.

## 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 (including with your host family) 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. During the homestay period, students are required to have breakfast and dinner with their families. While on excursion, you will contribute to the food preparations. In between excursions, you will be staying in apartments in Byron Bay with cooking facilities and will be responsible for preparing your own meals. When we have group meals on excursions, we always have a vegetarian or vegan option if needed. With homestays, we can usually match vegetarian and vegan students with

appropriate families if you include this in your application, but we cannot guarantee such arrangements.

## SAFETY, SECURITY, AND HEALTH

Maintaining good health is critical to having a successful semester. To help you do that, we have provided [Health Guidelines and Requirements](#) for your program.

It is very important that you read the Health Guidelines and Requirements document as early as possible and examine it with your medical provider. The guidelines include recommended immunizations; a suggested calendar for immunizations and other prophylaxes; and valuable information on how to avoid exposure to common carriers of disease.

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](#).

Australia is a relatively safe country. In line with Australian cultural norms, the program sets high behavioral expectations related to student health and safety. You will be required to adhere to all safety-related instructions given by program staff and to respect their judgment in these matters. Specific risks and related behavioral guidance will be reviewed during orientation. In particular, you will be asked to always wear available seat belts, be vigilant when crossing roads, never extend any part of your body outside a moving vehicle, follow guidelines about swimming in the ocean, and not to drink alcohol to the point of impaired judgment. You will also be expected to respect and abide by the judgment of staff regarding the safety issues related to your Independent Project and you will have to comply with the guidelines for maintaining regular contact with program staff during this period. Breaches of safety protocols are regarded very seriously and may result in disciplinary action.

## HOMESTAYS

As many SIT Study Abroad alumni will tell you, the homestay experience can be one of the most rewarding aspects of the program. We hope you will come prepared for the experience and committed to moving beyond cultural immersion as you begin to question, distinguish, and analyze the host culture vis-à-vis your own culture and come to a deeper understanding of both.

Family structures vary in every culture. SIT Study Abroad values the diversity of homestay families, and your family may include a single mother of two small children or a large extended family with many people coming and going all the time. Additionally, please bear in mind that, in many countries, the idea of what constitutes a “home” may be different from what you expect. You will need to be prepared to adapt to a new life with a new diet, a new schedule, new people, and new priorities and expectations.

Each program’s homestay coordinator will be responsible for placing students in homestays. These placements are made first based on health concerns, including any allergies or dietary needs, to the extent possible. **Please note: in order to ensure the best fit for students and families, SIT may make final adjustments to homestay placements after student arrival in country. Therefore, SIT will not provide information about your homestay family before you depart for the program.**

On this program, you will be staying in one homestay. On this program you will spend two weeks in a homestay with a host in Lismore or nearby rural locations in northern New South Wales. During this time, students meet for regular group discussions, field trips, lectures and workshops. The homestays provide students with insights into Australian culture and allow them to establish ties in the community, outside of the group.

## OTHER ACCOMMODATIONS

We move around quite a bit on this program. You will be staying in apartments in Byron Bay, in hostels, hotels, and cabins on excursions; and in tents during orientation, the ecopsychology workshop, and on the Aboriginal camping trip (a total of about 8 nights of camping). It will be rare for you to have your own room; most nights you will be sharing a room with other students. During the Independent Project period, you have your choice in housing; some past students have stayed on their

own in hostels, with classmates in apartments, in national parks barracks or research stations, or with homestay families. Your decision will largely depend on the constraints of your ISP topic or location of your internship, the lodging options available at your location, and your preferences. You are responsible for making your own arrangements for ISP accommodation.

## TRANSPORTATION

We will be using buses for most excursions and local transportation, and will travel by plane to Sydney, Melbourne and Tasmania. We offset all greenhouse gas emissions from our group travel.

## 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, 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.

## PHONES AND E-MAIL

As part of SIT’s commitment to student safety and security, all students are required to have a working phone capable of making and receiving both local and international calls throughout the duration of the program. For that purpose, students are required to either (a) bring an open, unlocked phone from the U.S. to the program that is able to accept a local SIM card, and is compatible with and usable at the program location, (b) within the first week upon arrival in country to purchase a phone locally, or (c) bring a dual SIM smart phone. During orientation, with assistance from SIT Study Abroad staff, students will learn how to use their cellphone, how to purchase and use an appropriate local SIM card, and how to acquire minutes for calls and texting. SIT Study Abroad requires that each student have a local number for communication with the homestay family and program staff.

While we recognize that alternative communication methods can be free or cheaper than cell service i.e. Facetime, Skype, WhatsApp, etc. those programs

alone do not satisfy our need for regular communication with the local program staff and partners, nor do they meet our emergency communication needs. Therefore, local cellular capacity on each student's phone is required for the duration of the program. Students are required to maintain a minimum amount of phone credits at all times for emergency calls. Full compliance with this policy is expected.

*If you arrive early and want to purchase a SIM for your phone, the best company is Optus since they have a shop in Byron Bay, but Telstra and Boost are also acceptable. The other companies do not provide sufficient coverage. You should let your family know that you will not have internet access during orientation for the first five 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. Your family can always contact you in an emergency through SIT in Vermont.*

Wireless internet is available free in your apartments in Byron Bay and at some of the other places we will stay. The program can supply you with mobile broadband modems if you wish. These will enable you to access the internet in most, but not all, other places we will stay. Alternatively, you can opt to use your smartphone as a hot spot. The internet access provided is designed to enable you to fulfill the



academic requirements of the course and you will be responsible for any excess usage charges.

You should inform your family and friends that the group will not always be in locations where there is easy access to telephones and email, thus 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).

## MAILINGS

For this program, **U.S. Postal Service Express services are available in country**. 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.

For this program, please note that mail takes at least 2 weeks to arrive and express mail is not much faster. Generally, US Postal Service Express Mail is the cheapest and most reliable method for sending packages, as it is delivered through the Australian Postal system (unlike most other couriers). This makes it much easier to collect the packages. 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 four 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 parcels should be sent to the following address:

**Student Name**  
c/o Peter Brennan  
PO Box 58  
Mullumbimby  
NSW 2482, Australia

**If the courier will not send to a PO Box** then you can use this address:

**Student Name**  
c/o Peter Brennan  
5 Station St  
Mullumbimby  
NSW 2482, Australia

The delivery services listed above sometimes require a phone number to mail a package internationally. Please use the student's Australian cell phone number.

## MONEY

In addition to tuition, SIT Study Abroad program fees cover room and board throughout the program. When room and/or board are not taken with the group, students will be given a stipend to cover

related expenses. SIT will cover daily commuting costs, if any, and excursions that are part of the normal program itinerary. During the ISP period, students will receive a stipend for basic room and board only, based on the cost of living at the program base. **Any domestic travel, interpretation services, or supplies necessary for the ISP are the students' responsibility.** Please plan accordingly.

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. Travelers' checks can be directly deposited into your Australian bank account.

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

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.

Following are suggestions for spending money during the program, including estimates for textbooks, ISP-related expenses, medical expenses, personal spending, and gifts. Figures are based on recent student evaluations, though individual spending habits vary widely and **these costs are averages.**



A suggested total amount of money to budget ranges from **US \$720 to \$1,600.** You will need money for travel to your ISP site, phone calls to researchers, photocopying materials, and printing and

binding your report. Minimum ISP/Internship expenses are US\$100 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 in western or northern Australia, you may need to allow up to \$400 for the round trip airfare.

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.

Please budget approximately:

<b>Personal spending (from past student suggestions):</b>	800 USD
<b>Books, printing, supplies:</b>	80 USD
<b>Up-front medical costs:</b>	36-56 USD/visit
<b>Potential ISP/Internship travel expenses:</b>	320 USD
<b>Typical Internet/ phone usage:</b>	80 USD
<b>Estimated total:</b>	1336 USD

## 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 section of the [Student Handbook](#).

Please note that any visitors during the course of the program 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.

During the program, students follow an intense schedule of classes and field-based learning assignments, even during the ISP/Internship. 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. Please note that you will not have a long break during the program, such as Thanksgiving or Spring Break.

Students are not allowed to leave Australia at any time during the program. You are also not allowed any independent travel during the program unless it is specifically related to your ISP research and is approved by the Academic Director. Former students highly encourage post- or pre-program travel.

Further details regarding the independent travel policy can be found in the [Student Handbook](#).

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.

## PACKING GUIDELINES

### LUGGAGE

Please pack lightly and include only necessary items. You should be able to carry all your luggage on your own. Try to minimize the weight of your bag(s) since you will likely be acquiring more belongings while abroad.

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.

### CLOTHING GUIDELINES

Plan to mostly dress casually. Generally, Australians dress as casually as Americans – jeans, shorts, tee shirts, swimsuits, and flip-flops. 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, much of the semester you will be in towns.

### EQUIPMENT

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



feel like you need a more luxurious sleeping mat, you may bring your own.

## COMPUTERS AND OTHER ELECTRONICS

You must bring a laptop computer. It 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 also recommended that you insure your computer, smart phone, and other valuables for full coverage in the event of loss or theft. SIT is not responsible for theft, loss, or any duty tax you may have to pay when you enter the country.

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 the program can provide mobile broadband internet modems for when we travel and for the ISP/Internship period. Beyond a basic allowance for class requirements, it is the students' responsibility to pay for extra usage charges for these modems. \$800 should be more than adequate to cover your phone and data costs for the semester unless you are downloading a lot of video or using Skype with video a lot. While these modems will work in most places we visit, we do 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 not have internet or cell phone access.

Assignments are usually typed and submitted via email. You will need to print out and make a copy of your ISP report but there are plenty of copy shops available for this. Because you will not always have access to the internet it is important that you have word processing software on your computer. You

cannot rely on cloud-based software such as Google Docs.

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

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.

## WHAT YOU CANNOT OBTAIN IN COUNTRY

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 washing machines at most places you will stay but Australians usually dry their clothes outside, so there may not always be driers.

## ALUMNI CONTACTS

If you have further questions, please contact your admissions counselor and/or ask an alumni contact: <http://studyabroad.sit.edu/admitted-students/contact-a-former-student/>.

### **Don't miss the Packing List on the next page!**

These packing guidelines are based on suggestions from past students and your academic director.

# PACKING LIST

## GENERAL

- 1 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 shirts (of various thickness with at least two long sleeve)
- 2 - pairs of shorts
- 2 sets of nice clothes for going out at night and ISP/internship meetings
- 1 pair of shoes for going out
- 1 pair of jeans or sweatpants
- 1 pair of water-resistant long pants
- 1 pair of lightweight long pants
- 1 good quality waterproof raincoat (essential for safety in cold weather)
- 1 or 2 swimming suits
- 1 pair of sandals (Teva or Chacos are good)
- 1 hat to protect you from the sun
- 1 hat for cold weather
- 1 pair of shoes/boots for hiking (we only do about four half-day hikes and a bunch of shorter ones, but some of the trails we use are pretty rough and often wet and muddy, and at times we may be walking in snow. So, decide on what sort of footwear you feel comfortable with. Some students like to have a proper hiking boot, while others think that it is not worth carrying heavy and bulky hiking boots).

## TRAVEL DOCUMENTS

- Passport
- Yellow WHO Card (see the [Safety, Security, and Health](#) document for more information)
- 2 photocopies of your passport stored separately from your actual passport
- Photocopy of visa

## 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 watch with an alarm or small alarm clock
- 1 water bottle (1QT minimum)
- Sunglasses
- Sleeping bag
- Laptop computer
- USB drive
- A large note book with a hard cover for taking lecture notes

## OPTIONAL

- Pajamas
- A camera
- A camping pillow

***Remember to place all valuable items and any prescriptions in your carry-on luggage while traveling, and all sharp items in your checked luggage.***