

Sydney

Brief history of Sidney

Sydneys original inhabitants predated European settlers by at least 50,000 years. Traditional art can still be found on rock faces and traces have been left behind by local Aboriginal people, who hunted, gathered and fished in the area's well-wooded surroundings and sheltered harbour.

Early contact with the outside world may have included sightings of ships from Portugal and China, but James Cook's arrival in 1770 changed Sydney forever. The mariner claimed the east coast of the continent for Britain and eighteen years later, Captain Arthur Phillip led the eleven ships of the First Fleet into Port Jackson on 26 January 1788.

The aim was not to build a great city but to establish a prison settlement for British convicts. The eastern 'official' side of the original settlement still contains the buildings that denoted power and control, while the western side of the town was altogether more unruly. Free settlers began to arrive, convicts earned emancipation and the economy evolved with schools, churches, markets, stores, theatres and a library appearing among the prison infrastructure. The post-penal economy was driven by industries such as whaling, sealing and the lucrative wool trade. The transportation of convicts from Britain ended in 1840.

In 1842, the City of Sydney was established with elections, offices and all the trappings of a free society. When gold was discovered in 1851, people began pouring into the city from Europe, North America and China.

By the end of the 19th century Sydney was one of the largest cities in the western world, with a population of half a million people.

Tourist attractions in Sydney

As Australia's oldest, largest and most urban city, beautiful Sydney has something special to offer every visitor. Broad sandy beaches and scenic cruises make the Harbour City the perfect holiday destination for travellers looking for fun on the sand and sea. First-class dining, shopping and cultural institutions like the iconic Sydney Opera House beckon those searching for an enriching travel experience. A compact city surrounded by national parks, Sydney serves as a convenient base for adventures in Australia's diverse natural environments too.



1. Sydney Opera House

Perched on the waterfront of Bennelong Point, the Sydney Opera House is one of the world's most famous buildings. Designed by Danish architect Jørn Utzon, the structure's sloping white roofs make the performing arts centre appear as if it's a giant ship setting out to sea.

2. Bondi Beach

Located just minutes away from Sydney's Central Business District (CBD), Bondi Beach is a mile-long sweep of golden sand lined with red-tile-roofed homes, apartments and green spaces.

3. Queen Victoria Building

More commonly referred to as the QVB, the Queen Victoria Building is a five-story shopping centre that fills an entire city block and houses nearly 200 retailers. It features a large glass dome sheathed in copper, ornamental cast-iron railings and numerous stained glass windows.

4. Sydney Tower

Standing 260 metres above ground level, the building's Sydney Tower Eye features an enclosed viewing platform that fully encircles the structure. The tower has three dining facilities, including the revolving restaurant 360 Bar and Dining. The latest addition to the Tower is a "4D" cinema, which enhances the theatrical experience with special effects like wind and bubbles.

**5. Sydney Harbour Bridge**

The iconic Sydney Harbour Bridge is both the main method of crossing the harbour and a travel destination for adventurous visitors. Completed in 1932, the bridge features an arch that stands 134 metres above sea level and spans 503 metres. In 1998, the city opened a Bridge Climb attraction that allows hardy visitors to ascend to the top of the arch.

6. Darling Harbour

The neighbourhood is now home to some of the most popular tourist attractions in Sydney, including the Australian National Maritime Museum, the Sydney Aquarium, the Aboriginal Centre and an IMAX theatre with the world's largest screen.

7. Royal Botanic Gardens

Overlooking the harbour, the urban park contains more than 7,500 species of plants, many of which are native to Australia. Standout collections include the Tropical Centre, which features plants housed in pyramid-shaped greenhouses, and the Rare and Threatened Species Garden, which includes an ancient Wollemi Pine, a genus of tree that dates back 200 million years.

8. The Rocks

The Rocks is the city's oldest neighbourhood. Named after its rocky shore, The Rocks was Australia's first permanent European settlement and the place where the country's convict history began. Today, it is a popular tourist destination packed with art galleries, chic boutiques, trendy restaurants and souvenir shops.

9. Australian National Maritime Museum

The museum's seven main galleries cover the nation's maritime history, from the discovery of the Land Down Under to the country's naval defence in World War II and beyond. Tickets are available that include entrance to the museum as well as tours of several of the vessels moored outside.

10. Taronga Zoo

The world-class Taronga Zoo gives visitors a close-up view of Australia's indigenous creatures as well as animals from all over the world. Highlights include the zoo's Roar and Snore experience, which lets visitors stay overnight to observe nocturnal fauna, and the Nura Diya tour, which features guides who share stories about Aboriginal life.

Australian outback

The Outback is the colloquial name for the vast desert region that comprises most of Australia's interior. Its gateway is the town of Alice Springs, and its landmarks include Uluru (aka Ayers Rock), a red-rock monolith, the sculpted cliffs of Kings Canyon and ancient Aboriginal rock paintings at Kakadu National Park.

1. Ayers Rock

It is a huge chunk of sandstone and a 'true' monolith, rising about 350m from its barren surrounds. More interestingly, Ayers Rock extends even further than this below ground. A World Heritage site, Ayers Rock also goes by the Aboriginal name of Uluru.



Aboriginal tribes were living in the area 10,000 years ago. White men did not come to this area until the 1870s. Uluru is sacred to the Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. According to Aboriginal myth, in the Dreamtime the world was unformed and featureless until beings emerged from the void and travelled across the land, creating all living species and the features of the desert landscape. The record of Dreamtime can be found in the rock itself. The meanings of the rock's features are passed on to youth in songs at initiation ceremonies conducted in the caves along the base of Uluru.

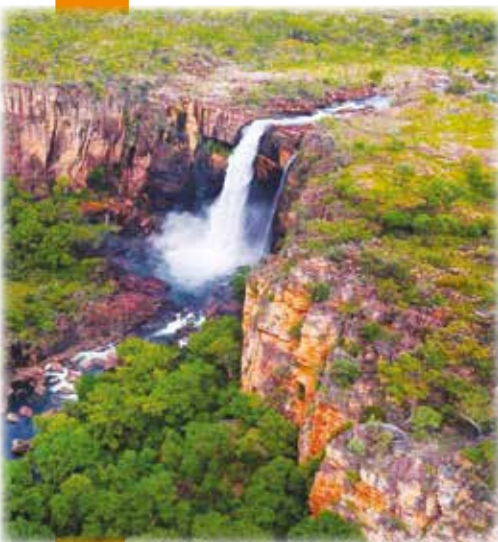
2. Watarrka National Park

Synonymous with Kings Canyon, the Park contains the western end of the George Gill Range. This scenic landscape of rugged ranges, rock holes and moist gorges, acts as a refuge for many plants and animals, making the Park an important conservation area and a major attraction of central Australia. Kings

Canyon features ancient sandstone walls, sculptured by the elements, rising up 100m to a plateau of rocky domes.

3. Kakadu National Park

Located 240 kilometres east of Darwin in Australia's tropical north, Kakadu National Park is Australia's largest terrestrial national park. Kakadu covers almost 20,000 square kilometres and is a place of enormous ecological and biological diversity. It extends from the coast and estuaries in the north through floodplains, billabongs and lowlands to rocky ridges and stone country in the south. These landscapes are home to a range of rare and endemic plants and animals, including more than one-third of Australia's bird species and one-quarter of its freshwater and estuarine fish species.



New Zealand

Main attractions in New Zealand

New Zealand is an otherworldly, photogenic and friendly country offering visitors unbeatable changes for adventure and exploration. The rugged islands are home to dense native forests, mountains, beaches, glaciers, thermal regions and fjords that have been well-preserved by the environmentally-conscious government and culture. New Zealand is a place where traditional Maori culture mixes with modernity in cosmopolitan cities, charming villages and vast expanses of untouched wilderness.

1. Milford Sound

Milford Sound is among the most famous tourist attractions in New Zealand. Lying at the most northern and accessible end of Fiordland National Park, Milford sound offers some of the world's most staggering coastal scenery with its dramatic peaks and dark blue waters. The area's frequent downpours only enhance this South Island beauty, sending numerous waterfalls cascading down the cliffs.

2. Bay of Islands

The Bay of Islands is one of the most popular holiday destinations in New Zealand. The picturesque area contains 144 islands, many secluded bays and some great sandy beaches. This beautiful bay has an abundance of marine life including whales, penguins, dolphins and the big marlin. Not surprisingly, it is a popular tourist spot for sailing yachts on world cruises and international sport fishermen.

3. Tongariro National Park

The first national park of New Zealand, Tongariro is known for its surprises and extremes. The park's diverse range of ecosystems includes tranquil lakes, active volcanoes, herb fields, untamed forests and desert-like plateaus.

4. Rotorua

Rotorua is known as the thermal wonderland of New Zealand. There are numerous geysers and hot springs in and around the city. Many of these are in parks and reserves. Natural eruptions of steam, hot water and mud occasionally occur in new locations. In addition to the Lady Knox Geyser, nearby Wai-O-Tapu is also a popular tourist attraction with many hot springs noted for their colourful appearance.



5. Franz Josef Glacier

This glacier, located within Westland National Park in the southwest, is one of the world's most accessible. Visitors can walk right up to the foot of the massive glacier or take a helicopter ride over the dazzling Ice Age remnant. Together with Fox Glacier it is one of South Westland's major draw cards for tourists.



Hong Kong

Brief history of Hong Kong

Situated on the southeast coast of China, Hong Kong's strategic location on the Pearl River Delta and South China Sea has made it one of the world's most thriving and cosmopolitan cities.

Hong Kong as we know it today was founded when China's Qing dynasty government was defeated in the First Opium War in 1842, when it ceded Hong Kong Island to Britain. Within 60 years, Kowloon, the New Territories and 235 Outlying Islands were also leased to Britain.

From its earliest days as a British colony, Hong Kong served as a centre of international trade. In the turbulent years of the early 20th century, the city's population was bolstered by refugees, mostly from China. The arrival of immigrants in large numbers helped give Hong Kong a new role as a major manufacturing hub. It also brought economically stimulating energy and industry to the city's character. In recent decades, as the economy of mainland China opened up, Hong Kong has transformed yet again – this time into a service-based economy as well as an important gateway to the world's largest market.

Under the principle of 'One Country, Two Systems', Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China on 1 July 1997. This arrangement allows the city to enjoy a high degree of autonomy, including retaining its capitalist system, independent judiciary and rule of law, free trade and freedom of speech.

Tourist attractions in Hong Kong

Nicknamed the Oriental Pearl, Hong Kong is one of Asia's most popular travel destinations thanks to its spectacular natural beauty and man-made marvels. Located off China's southeastern coast, Hong Kong is a glittering, world-class commercial centre where Chinese culture, British colonial influences and modern day high-technology blend together. While it contains the world's highest concentration of skyscrapers and one of the highest population densities, Hong Kong also offers plenty of green spaces, mountain views and beaches.

Some of the must-see attractions include:

1. Ocean Park and Disneyland Hong Kong

Famous amusement theme parks, prestigious museums, fabulous shopping malls, bustling night markets, horse racing, beautiful beaches and rides on the world's longest outdoor escalator.

2. The Peak

Hong Kong's highest peak which offers awe-inspiring views of the harbor.

3. Victoria Harbour

A spectacular sight at night with all the dazzling skyscrapers.

