

Big Five Presents
Australia

So much of Australia's boisterous personality is simply over the top, making it all but impossible to single out one feature or location.

Australia captivates from the very first encounter. It has cosmopolitan cities, the great stoic Outback, and the staggering Great Barrier Reef. But today's Australia is so much more. It is home to a large number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites from the Uluru (Ayers Rock) to the Kimberley. Old, family vineyards of Hunter Valley, the remarkable island of Tasmania, lush old-world rainforests, unique railway journeys, and a cornucopia of extravagant scenery and cultural encounters are all layered one upon the next on this brilliant canvas. But there is still more. It is Australia's new frontier, one that is as much about attitude as it is about place. It takes to heart the real meaning of sustainable tourism and authenticity. It opens up new areas for exploration, while at the same time being mindful of the importance of preserving traditional cultures, and the unique wildlife and landscapes that make Australia such a dazzlingly diverse destination. Big Five has sought out partners who share our vision of a sustainable future that still allows our guests to explore well off the tourist track.

For example, hidden amid the harshly beautiful and rugged coastline of the Kimberley in northwestern Australia is some remarkably rich and diverse habitat, almost untouched by the modern world. This Australia has a powerful charm that will call you back time and again.



Suggested Itinerary

Day 1: Sydney, Australia

The city is known for its distinct skyline, eccentric waterfront and legendary convict past.

Day 2: Sydney

Sophisticated Sydney's highlights include culture, history, nearby nature and a contemporary casual lifestyle.

Day 3: Sydney / Blue Mountains

The region is a popular natural landscape with wildlife that includes iconic kangaroos, wallaroos, and wallabies.

Day 4: Blue Mountains / Sydney / Barossa Valley

Barossa Valley is just one of more than 60 designated wine regions in Australia.

Days 5: Barossa Valley / Flinders

Cave paintings, artifacts and magnificent scenery distinguish Flinders.

Days 6/7: Flinders Ranges

Trekkers climb Mt. Remarkable and hike the Wirrabara and Bundaleer forests.

Day 8: Flinders Ranges / Adelaide

Adelaide is nestled in the heart of South Australia.

Day 9: Adelaide / Uluru (Ayers Rock)

Uluru is a startling monolith in the red heart of Australia, and a sacred site to the local Anangu people.

Day 10: Uluru & Kata Tjuta (Olgas)

These glorious rock formations feature prominently in the creation mythology, Dreamtime, of the original inhabitants.

Day 11: Uluru / Brisbane / Scenic Rim

The Scenic Rim encompasses lush rainforests, spectacular landforms and ancient and rare wildlife.

Day 12: Scenic Rim

Wineries and art galleries, bushwalking tracks and small towns present a myriad of options.

Day 13: Brisbane / Hamilton Island

Largest of the Whitsunday Islands, Hamilton offers opportunities for diving, fishing and whale watching.

Days 14/15: Hamilton Island

Activities can be tailored to include sailing, yachting and excursions to the Great Barrier Reef.

Day 16: Hamilton Island / Melbourne

Melbourne is home to many of the nation's significant cultural and sporting events.

Day 17: Melbourne

A center of commerce and cultural activity, the city is noted for Victorian architecture, museums, galleries and shops.

Day 18: Melbourne / Depart

Custom Options

Alice Springs, Uluru & Kata Tjuta (2 days)

The red heart of Australia is richly told in its aboriginal sites and pioneer settler towns and ranches.

Great Barrier Reef & Whitsundays (4 days)

Pristine reefs and untouched islands make this combination ideal for yacht charters, sailing, scuba diving and kayaking.

Jervis Bay & Lord Howe Island (3 days)

Crystal waters teem with marine life and whales migrate through these waters. Jervis has been officially noted as having the whitest sand in the world.

Kimberly Region (5-14 days)

Pink diamonds, aboriginal art sites, remote rugged coastlines and unique wildlife are just the beginning here.

Kangaroo Island (3-4 days)

The island is regarded as Australia's Galapagos with exceptional wildlife and natural beauty.

Perth, Western Australia & Ningaloo Reef (5-7 days)

Historic towns and the dramatic Pinnacle Desert's limestone pillars blend with chances to swim with the world's largest fish, whale sharks.

Port Douglas & Daintree Rainforest (4 days)

This seaside village is a base for exploring Daintree Rainforest's exceptional biodiversity.

Tasmania (5 days)

Ancient rainforest, alpine heath, glacial lakes and likable, historic towns combine to make this island intriguing.

Top End (5-7 days)

Aboriginal mythologies and sacred sites are set in the rugged landscapes of Northern Australia.

Wine Regions (3 days)

Wines are produced in every state, and more than 60 designated wine regions offer a wide variety of options.

About Australia

Alice Springs, Uluru & Kata Tjuta: Alice Springs is the second largest town in the Northern Territory, close to the geographic center of Australia. It was once the land of the Aranda people, who inhabited the central desert for thousands of years. The town was originally developed as a station on the overland telegraph line, linking Adelaide to Darwin and Great Britain. Alice Springs' desert lifestyle has inspired some unique events such as the Henley-on-Todd Regatta, featuring 'boat' races on a waterless riverbed. Uluru (Ayers Rock) is the giant sandstone monolith famed for its theatrical sunrises and sunsets, when the rock glows a dozen shades of red and orange. Uluru and Kata Tjuta (Olgas) are sacred to the aboriginal people and featured in their ancient mythology.

Flinders Ranges: Cave paintings, rock engravings and other artifacts indicate that the Adnyamathanha people have lived in the Flinders Ranges for tens of thousands of years. Scientists believe that 500 million years ago the rock layers were squeezed and folded into a long mountain chain. St. Mary Peak, at 1,170 meters / 3,839 feet, adjoins the Flinders Ranges National Park. Bird life is rich and varied with more than 100 native species. The area is popular with hikers, cyclists and outdoor enthusiasts.



Great Barrier Reef & Whitsundays: The Great Barrier Reef complex contains a staggering abundance of marine life and comprises of over 3,000 individual reef systems spread along 2,000 kilometers / 1,243 miles, and has the world's largest collection of corals – some 400 different kinds of coral, coral sponges, mollusks, rays and dolphins. There are more than 1,500 species of tropical fish, 200 types of birds, and 20 types of reptiles that includes sea turtles and giant clams more than 120 years old. This is a breeding area for humpback whales migrating from the Antarctic. In recognition of its vital significance, the reef has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Whitsundays encompass 74 idyllic and mostly uninhabited islands that coexist with the reef system. They are the closest point off the Queensland coast. The reef, in fact, protects these islands from huge ocean swells. That equates to some of the safest sailing and cruising waters in the world. The Whitsundays stretch 900 kilometers / 559 miles north of Brisbane. Hamilton is the largest of Whitsundays islands. Day trips from here to the barrier reef offer opportunities for diving, fishing and whale watching (July-September). Luxury cruises can be privately chartered. Catamarans, kayaks, paddle skis and diving equipment are available.

Jervis Bay & Lord Howe Island: Jervis is known for excellent recreational fishing, scuba diving and whale watching. The majority of whales sighted are migrating humpback whales (June to November), however other species sometimes enter the bay including Southern Right whales, False Killer whales, Orcas and Minke whales. Lord Howe Island is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique beauty, remarkable geology and rare collection of birds, plants and marine life. The island is an eroded remnant of a seven-million-year-old shield volcano with a coral reef and lagoon. Only 400 visitors are allowed at any one time on this island of unspoiled beauty.

Kangaroo Island: Covering almost 4,500 square kilometers / 1,737 miles, it is Australia's third largest island and offers the best of the mainland on a smaller, more intimate scale. More than a third of the island falls under conservation or national park status offering protection to native residents such as New Zealand fur seals, koalas, kangaroos, Australian sea lions, ospreys and echidnas. The island has a rich cultural heritage. Its dramatic coast, carved landscapes, sheer limestone cliffs, sheltered coves and stretches of sugar-white sand are picture perfect.

Kimberley Region: The Kimberley was one of the earliest areas of Australia to be settled some 41,000 years ago. Dinosaur footprints 130 million years old are preserved in rock at Gantheaume Point. Broome was once the center of the world's pearling industry. Australia's first south sea pearl farm was at Kuri Bay in the heart of a remote coastline some 220 kilometers / 137 miles from the nearest main settlement of Derby. Hidden amid the harshly beautiful and rugged coastline of the Kimberley in northwestern Australia is some remarkably rich and diverse habitat, almost untouched by the modern world. The UNESCO World Heritage listed Purnululu National Park has towering orange-and-black striped rocks of the Bungle Bungle Range, geological formations

that rise up to 578 meters / 1,896 feet. Kununurra means 'big water' to the traditional Aboriginal owners, and vast Lake Argyle meets that description at 1,000 square kilometers / 386 square miles. The Kimberley is also home to the Argyle Diamond Mine known for its rare pink diamonds. The Mitchell Plateau is culturally significant with a rich collection of aboriginal art sites. The park also shelters more than 150 bird species and 25 mammal species.

Melbourne: About 47 years after the first European settlement in Australia, Melbourne was founded by free settlers in 1835 as a pastoral settlement around the Yarra River. By the 1850s gold rush, it was the second largest in the entire British Empire. It remains a major center of commerce, industry and cultural activity. It is noted for its mix of Victorian and contemporary architecture, an extensive tram network, gardens, museums, galleries and shops. Built in 1878, Queen Victoria Market is a vibrant crossroads of cultures. Phillip Island is fun at dusk when a parade of penguins return to burrows on the island.

Perth, Western Australia & Ningaloo Reef: Perth is a city of friendly charm and lovely views. The area encompasses Fremantle, a seaside town with a convict history, modern ocean-racing yachts, terraced houses, museums and galleries set between the Indian Ocean and the Swan River. Dramatic Pinnacle Desert features strange limestone pillars rising out of the sand. Margaret River region is dotted with some 60 wineries. On Western Australia's north coast, Ningaloo Reef has one of the largest reefs in the world that is accessed directly from the beach. Whale sharks, the largest fish in the world, visit the reef between March and June. The reef hosts 200 species of hard corals and over 520 species of fish as well as manta rays, humpback whales, dugongs and turtles.

Port Douglas & Daintree Rainforest: Port Douglas, founded in 1877 after the discovery of gold, is a seaside village north of Cairns along an especially scenic coast road. It is huddled at the end of a peninsula with a natural harbor on one side of the village and the sandy sweep of Four Mile Beach on the other. The town features village shops, galleries, historic buildings and the seaside Port Douglas Sunday Market. Daintree Rainforest contains 30% of the frog, reptile and marsupial species in Australia, and a staggering 65% of Australia's bat and butterfly species. About 18% of bird species in the country are here. There are also more than 12,000 species of insects. Daintree National Park is part of the Wet Tropics of Queensland and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Scenic Rim: Within easy reach of Brisbane, the Gold Coast and Northern New South Wales, the Scenic Rim is a wonderland of lush rainforests and spectacular landforms and is home to ancient and rare creatures. It also boasts scenic small towns, wineries and art galleries. It is a perfect area for nature walks, and is the gateway to several national parks such as Main Range National Park, Mt. French National Park and Moogerah Peaks National Park.





Sydney & Blue Mountains National Park: Radiocarbon dating suggests that the Sydney region has been inhabited for at least 30,000 years. The city is the capital of New South Wales. It was established in 1788 with the arrival of the first British settlers, mostly convicts. The city is known for its distinct skyline, which includes the eccentric Sydney Opera House, Harbour Bridge and the waterfront. The metropolitan area is surrounded by national parks, and has many bays, rivers and inlets as well as a number of excellent beaches. The historic area known as The Rocks takes in the oldest quarter of Sydney, where early convict settlements began. Cobblestone lanes, old neighborhoods, shops, pubs and charming churches weave a rich tapestry of early life here. The Greater Blue Mountains range is a UNESCO World Heritage Wilderness Area. With dramatic gorges up to 760 meters / 2,490 feet deep, the park protects rare plants and isolated animals. Leura village thrives in the heart of the park. Spectacular Grose Valley has nature walks and a scenic railway. The 4,000-acre Wolgan Valley Nature Reserve nestles between the Gardens of Stone and Wollemi National Parks. This region is one of the most popular natural landscapes in Australia. Native wildlife includes the iconic kangaroo, wallaroo and wallaby.

Tasmania: Tasmania sits about 150 miles off the southern coast of Australia, separated by Bass Strait. It is home to some of the tallest and oldest trees in the world. A stand of Huon pines is estimated to be more than 10,000 years old. Rugged Freycinet Peninsula possesses one of Australia's finest stretches of coast with stunning views across the long curve of Great Oyster Bay. Freycinet National Park's jagged pink and grey granite peaks soar straight out of the water. Cradle Mountain National Park encompasses stands of beech, rainforest and alpine lands. Settled in 1803, Hobart is Australia's smallest capital city. Many of its convict-built sandstone buildings have been preserved. Bordering the national park is the small settlement of Coles Bay. Secluded Wineglass Bay is considered by many as one of the world's ten best beaches.

Top End: The Top End of the Northern Territory is known for its tropical weather, indigenous culture, national parks and a casual, outdoor lifestyle. Northern Australia is a vast region stretching from the Kimberley Plateau of Western Australia through the Top End of the Northern Territory to the tip of Queensland's Cape York. Included in that area are Arnhem Land, Kakadu and Bamurru Plains. They embrace some of the most melodramatic landscapes and aboriginal sites in Australia. Arnhem Land is set amid a

quarter of a million acres of pristine wilderness, and is part of the aboriginal homelands. Mt. Borradaile is known for its prehistoric rock art. Bamurru Plains is located on the edge of the Mary River floodplains just a short distance from the coast. It is set in the heart of Swim Creek Station, a privately owned buffalo station on the boundary of Kakadu National Park, renowned for its 5,000 ancient rock art sites.

Wine Regions: Some of the first vine cuttings brought to the new penal colony came from the South in 1788. Today, Australia is the world's fourth largest exporter of wine. Wine is produced in every state, with more than 60 designated wine regions totaling 160,000 hectares / 478,396 acres. Most of Australia's wine regions are in the southern, cooler parts of the country, with vineyards located in South Australia, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia, Tasmania and Queensland. The wine regions produce distinctive varieties that take advantage of the each area's soil and climate differences. Shiraz, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Semillon, Pinot Noir, Riesling, and Sauvignon Blanc are the major wines produced.

Best Time To Go

Australia is roughly equivalent to the US in size with many variations in climate. Summer, the rainy season in the tropical north, lasts December to February. November through March are the hottest. Spring and autumn are mild and the best time for bush walks. Winter, June through August, is mild with snow in southern mountains and balmy temperatures in the north. In general, April to September temperatures are mild, and September and October are warm but not extremely hot.

*#\$650 - \$1700 per person per day
Land only, double occupancy*

Consider enhancing your adventure by including the following destinations: China (p53-56), Indonesia (p67-68), Malaysia & Singapore (p69-72), New Zealand (p157-160), Thailand (p81-84)



