

# Australia and New Zealand - people and culture

## A guide for businesses



### The countries

Modern Australia and New Zealand are just over 200 years old, but their indigenous history stretches back tens of thousands of years – and is quite different in each case.

The UK is Australia's fourth largest trading partner, while UK exports to New Zealand are worth around £385 million. Although there are differences between the two countries, there are lots of similarities, too. Business is quite informal and friendly, and people make an effort to get along.

But if you thought Antipodeans were crude, beer-drinking chauvinists—you may be in for a surprise. Today's Australia and New Zealand are sophisticated, hi-tech economies, and per head, New Zealanders are some of the highest mobile phone and internet users in the world.

Australia is now one of the world's most multicultural societies, with around 220 nationalities, and there's a growing Asian influence to be aware of. In New Zealand, the indigenous Maori population is asserting itself, both economically and culturally. The Maori language has official status, alongside English.



*The Koala bear, indigenous to Australia, is not related to any kind of bear.*

### Did you know... ?

- New Zealand boasts the world's longest place name - Taumatawhakatangi- hangakoauauotamateaturipukakapikimaungahoron-ukupokaiwhenuakitanata-hu.
- If someone in Australia asks you to "pass the Durex" they are referring to sellotape.
- If meeting with a New Zealand Maori in a traditional setting, the common greeting is the rubbing of noses.
- In Australia, bringing a cheap bottle of wine to a dinner party would be seen as a slight on the host. Chances are the bottle will be left unopened.
- To become a New Zealand citizen, you must swear an oath of allegiance to Queen Elizabeth. In Australia, this oath was replaced in 1994 by a pledge of commitment to Australia.

### Fast facts - Australia

**Location:** Oceania, continent between the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific Ocean.

**Capital:** Canberra

**Official Language(s):** English

**Population:** 20 million

**Ethnic Groups:** 92% Caucasian, 7% Asian, 1% aboriginal

**Religions:** 26% Catholic, 20% Anglican, 20% 'other Christian', 2% Buddhist, 1.5% Muslim, 30.5% unspecified

**Currency:** Australian Dollar

**Dialling Code:** +61

**Time:** Sydney +11 hours GMT

### Fast facts - New Zealand

**Location:** Oceania, islands in the South Pacific Ocean southeast of Australia.

**Capital:** Wellington

**Official Language(s):** English and Maori

**Population:** 4 million

**Ethnic Groups:** 70% Caucasian, 8% Maori, 6% Asian, 5% Pacific islander, 11% other

**Religions:** 15% Anglican, 12% Roman Catholic, 26% 'other Christian', 47% none/unspecified

**Currency:** New Zealand Dollar

**Dialling Code:** +64

**Time:** +13 hours GMT



*'Aussie rules' football, played in Australia and New Zealand.*

## Communication styles

- Both nations display a real sense of openness when communicating, although the Kiwis may be slightly more reserved at first.
- Open, direct and frank communication styles are the norm.
- This tendency to 'call a spade a spade' can cause offence but it should be kept in mind that this is 1) merely an extension of their desire not to treat people differently, 2) a reflection of their relaxed attitude and 3) their demand for honesty in communication and dealings with people.
- Derogatory jokes when the victim of the joke is present are common and should not be taken seriously.
- Such jokes expect replies in kind and the British have plenty of ammunition. Convicts, Rolf Harris, and voting to retain an English Queen give the "Poms" good material to work with.



Sydney Opera House and harbour

## Socialising

- Relationship building is important and this mainly takes place outside of business either for a drink or to attend a party/gathering of some sort.
- If invited for a drink you must adhere to the unspoken agreement that is the "shout" (i.e. the round).
- Not buying your round would be the height of bad manners.
- Unlike in many other parts of the world, when invited for dinner it is not the host or the wealthiest member who pays for the entire meal. The bill will mostly be split amongst all the diners.

## Further resources

UK Trade & Investment: Support for those wanting to do business in/with Australia/New Zealand. [www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk](http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk)

Access to Australian government information and services. [www.business.gov.au](http://www.business.gov.au)

Australian Business - organisation in the UK bringing together professionals and companies with business interests

in Australia and New Zealand. [www.australianbusiness.co.uk](http://www.australianbusiness.co.uk)

New Zealand Chambers of Commerce. [www.nzchamber.co.nz](http://www.nzchamber.co.nz)

Foreign & Commonwealth Office: Up to date travel advice for Australia/New Zealand. <http://www.fco.gov.uk>

*Please note: While every effort is made to ensure accuracy, the Regional Language Network does not take responsibility for the content of this briefing. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the Regional Language Network or of CILT, the National Centre for Languages.*

## Equality

- An over-arching cultural concept that is rooted within both cultures is egalitarianism.
- To be a "tall poppy" (i.e. stand above and look down on others) as the Australians say is neither commendable nor desirable.

As a result both peoples are relaxed when it comes to etiquette, airs and graces.

- The "rules" do not relate to how a fork should be held or how to greet someone but rather how you look upon and treat others.
- Self-praise, showing off or belittling others are an instant turn-off.
- These egalitarian leanings were famously displayed by cricketer Dennis Lillee when he greeted Queen Elizabeth with "G'day, how ya goin'?"

Interestingly this also manifests when taking a taxi, in that sitting in the back would be interpreted as a statement of superiority over the driver.

## Business meetings and negotiating

- Meetings are generally relaxed; however, this does not mean one should not approach them with the usual levels of professionalism.
- Greetings are casual and relaxed. A handshake and smile suffices. First names are used from the off, and strong eye contact is a sign of trust and confidence.
- Good conversation topics include sport, free-time activities and your experiences of the country.
- If you make a presentation, avoid hype, making exaggerated claims, or 'bells and whistles'.
- Australians and Kiwis are interested in what people 'can do', not what they say they can do. Honesty and integrity are crucial.
- Present your business case with facts and figures. Emotions and feelings are not important.
- Many Australians and Kiwis get down to business quickly with a minimum amount of small talk.
- They are quite direct and expect the same in return.
- They appreciate brevity and are not impressed by too much detail.
- Negotiations proceed quickly.
- Bargaining is not customary.
- They will expect your initial proposal to have only a small margin for negotiation.
- They do not like high-pressure techniques.
- Remember that December-January is summer time so many people will be on holidays.

RLN East Midlands: promoting a greater national capability in language and cultural skills for business and employment.  
Tel (to 30/7/07): 0115 9888478  
Tel (from 1/8/07): 01332 82643  
Fax (to 30/7/07): 0115 8533666  
Fax (from 1/8/07): 01332 826393  
[www.rln-eastmidlands.com](http://www.rln-eastmidlands.com)