



Australia Survival Guide

The people are really friendly, the animals and the environment not so much - unless you know what you're doing. You need to know how to avoid sharks, where crocodiles might lurk, and if a spider is deadly or not (most aren't).



You should learn how to spot a rip (strong current) at the beach or how to call for help if you're in one. Plus what to do if you're in the bush and you smell smoke.

It sounds like a frightening place, and indeed all Australians are aware of these precautions even though the vast majority

never need to call on them. Most have never seen a snake, shark or crocodile in the wild. Nor are they likely to living in their urban environments. But because we know that and also know you're scared to death of any of our creatures we like to play up the dangers.

However it remains true that once outside the cities, once you're using camping grounds, bush spots, national parks, lakes and isolated beaches you need to have a healthy regard for the wildlife. The general rule of thumb is to look, but don't touch - most of the country's dangerous animals are only unsafe if provoked. Remember not to poke the animals with a stick. Aside from this, here are some more practical tips to keep you safe during your Aussie adventure.

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Emergency Services.

If you need emergency help or witness someone who does, the phone number to dial in Australia for emergency services (Ambulance, Police and Fire) is 000 or 112 on a cell phone.

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Sharks and Crocodiles

Most travellers to Australia are surprised and relieved to arrive and find that the beaches are not swarming with sharks and Croc Dundee really was just a movie, not a way of life.

It's true that Australia has some large and savage beasts, but let's put them into perspective.

Statistically speaking it's more likely you'll be killed by lightning or fatal bee sting than by a croc or shark attack. But just in case...

How To Avoid a Croc Attack

While swimming or boating:

- If you see a crocodile sign, do not go swimming, paddling or wading. At all. Not even your big toe.
- If you're in an area where you told salties may be present, the same thing applies - no swimming. Especially at night.



A warning sign in northern Australia. That's a fake croc in the water.

- Don't sit on branches overhanging creeks.
- Don't dangle your feet over the side of boats.
- Set up at least 50 metres from the edge of the water.
- Be very cautious about collecting water and don't collect it from the same spot everyday.

While camping:

These reptiles are great at lunging out of the water and grabbing stuff from the banks. So,

- Don't leave leftover food near the water.

How To Avoid a Shark Attack

It's important to note no swimmers have been taken at patrolled beaches since 1942.

Surfers, dressed in wetsuits that make them look like a seal on a plate outside the patrolled area – that's a different story!

- Always swim at a patrolled beach and between the red and yellow flags - a shark alarm siren will sound if a shark is sighted at a patrolled beach.
- Don't swim too far from shore - this will isolate you.
- Swim in a group, as sharks are more likely to attack an individual.
- Avoid swimming when it's dark or during twilight hours when sharks are most active.
- Avoid waters with effluent or sewage outfalls and areas that are used by recreational or commercial fishers (sharks are attracted to the discarded fish guts).
- Avoid areas with signs of baitfish or fish feeding activity - diving seabirds are a good indicator (seabirds means small fish, small fish means bigger fish... you get the idea).



We're gonna need a bigger boat.

- Do not rely on seeing dolphins to indicate the absence of sharks - both often feed together on the same food.
- Exercise caution when swimming in water between sandbars or near steep drop offs - these are favourite hangouts for sharks.
- Do not swim near seal colonies. Seals are a main food source for White Pointer sharks.
- Do not enter or stay in the water if bleeding. Sharks can sense blood diluted

millions of times in water. (We're talking about actual bleeding, if it's just a cut it's okay to put on a Bandaid and go swimming).

Snakes and Spiders

You **will** encounter plenty of spiders on your Australian adventure, so it's important to put in context exactly what you're dealing with and how to stay safe.



The humble, harmless huntsman.

As a result of these two anti-venoms, there have been no deaths in Australia from a spider bite since 1979.

- Always shake out your shoes before putting them on.
- Avoid leaving clothes or towels on the floor.
- Wear shoes when you're playing outside and also at night.
- Always wear gloves when gardening.

You won't die (probably), but it will hurt like *&%\$!

How to avoid spider bite

Only two spiders, the funnel-web and the red-back, are currently considered dangerous in Australia. All spiders have venom glands, but only a few of the large species have fangs large enough to puncture skin and cause a reaction.

Approximately 2000 people are bitten each year by Redback Spiders, and Funnel-web spider anti-venom has been given to at least 100 patients since 1980 when it was first developed. An anti-venom for Redback Spiders was introduced in 1956.

How to treat spider bites (non venomous)

The most important decision in managing a spider bite is to decide if the spider was a Funnel-web spider a Red Back Spider, or another type of spider.

For most 'other' types of spider bites:

- Use an ice pack to lessen the pain and swelling.
- Paracetamol may help if you are in pain. Antihistamines could be useful if you are very itchy.

How to avoid snake bite

How many species of deadly snake are there in Australia? Heaps. 20 of the world's top 25 deadly ones.

Figures vary but between 30 and 500 people a year get bitten by a snake, but since 2010 only 8 people have died.

Around half of snake bites occur when people accidentally tread on one. So:

- Wear proper footwear in the bush.
- Watch where you step.
- Carry a torch.
- Make a lot of noise – snakes are extremely timid and will get out of your way if they hear/feel you coming.

Of the other people who get bitten, the majority are attempting to catch the snake!

Like we said – leave them alone, or call a professional snake catcher if it **must** be moved. Call the local veterinary clinic or the local council and ask them for help. But you can Google “snake catchers” too. You’ll be surprised how many of them there are!



A Red Bellied Black snake – that's its name not an accusation.

Insider's tip: *“Contrary to popular belief, it is not always boiling hot in Australia. You can even ski here in the winter! So plan your trip Down Under accordingly to catch the best weather. – Anna Phipps*

Beach and Bush Safety

That's the nasty animals dealt with, now learn how to handle the natural environment while at the beach or bushwalking.

Beach safety in Australia

Beach safety is quite straightforward but if you don't know the rules you may find yourself in a very dangerous situation.



Checking for sharks before a surf – just kidding.



First and foremost it is best to swim at patrolled beaches

Throughout the cities and even at small coastal towns the beaches will be patrolled during summer. There'll either be professional lifeguards, employed by the local council, or volunteer lifesavers.

At some of Australia's most popular beaches – Bondi, Manly, Surfers Paradise etc – the professional lifeguards patrol all year round. Lifeguards usually wear blue or white uniforms and have lots of modern lifesaving equipment at their disposal, and are highly-trained and extremely competent in the surf.

Lifesavers wear red and yellow uniforms and as part of their volunteer duties patrol on weekends and public holidays. Some of them are as well-trained as the lifeguards, and all have done training in basic rescue and resuscitation.

Lifeguards and lifesavers are always locals with a lot of experience and knowledge about conditions. They'll usually know you're in trouble before you do. Follow their instructions – they're trying to help you.

At patrolled beaches the first thing to do is pay attention to any signage, particularly if the signs say the beach is closed.



Red and yellow flags indicate a safe area.

This is not because the lifesavers are on a coffee break, it's because the beach is too dangerous to swim at – even for them (so who's going to come and rescue you?)

If the beach is open the safest place to swim is between the red and yellow flags. The flags are placed at the safest places to swim and are for swimmers only.

If you are surfing it is not good form to do it between the flags (lifeguards may confiscate your board).

Insider's tip: Travel light – most of Australia is pretty warm. If it's not warm where you're hanging out, head North to get your fix. – **Rebecca Hargrave**

Travelling around Australia away from population centres you will find that many beaches are not patrolled, often these are long stretches of rugged coastline that are best enjoyed from the sand for very good reason, if you get into trouble at these beaches, you are on your own.

Don't swim at unpatrolled beaches until you are confident you are a strong swimmer, can handle powerful surf, and can recognise a rip.

What's rip?

Rips are powerful currents of water that flow back out to sea and will drag you along.

What to do if caught in a rip

- Do not panic (easier said than done).
- A rip is usually relatively narrow, so if you swim parallel to the beach just a few metres you can often swim out of it back into calmer water.
- You can also float and go with the rip, because they often disperse just beyond the breakers. As long as you are a good swimmer you can then get yourself back to shore.
- If you are in trouble and need help from the Lifesavers raise one arm up in the air.



Marine stingers & jellyfish

It should come as no surprise to hear that Australia is home to a large range of lethal and non-lethal marine stingers!

Before you totally re-think your Aussie beach holiday, stingers are usually pretty easy to avoid and spot.

The lethal ones can cause a beach to be closed, in fact throughout Far North Queensland some beaches are closed from November to March.



Small but deadly.

Lethal stingers include Irukandji, Box Jellyfish and the Blue-Ringed Octopus.

To treat these stings rinse the affected area with vinegar or salt water - not freshwater or urine as some people may suggest - and pick off any tentacles that have stuck to

the skin. Do not rub the affected area and immediately seek out a lifesaver or lifeguard for assistance.

If you are at an unpatrolled beach and have been stung by anything you think may be lethal dial 000 for emergency assistance.

Bluebottles and non-lethal stingers

Non-lethal but painful nonetheless are Bluebottles, a small jellyfish which really is bright blue (makes them easy to spot).

You will know if and when Bluebottles are present at a beach as some will be washed up along the shoreline. Some people, especially children, find the sting painful, others say it causes a mild itch.

The best treatment is hot water (as hot as you can stand), the next best treatment is ice. Again, pick off any tentacles, don't rub with sand, and don't use vinegar.

The pain goes away after 15-30 minutes, and the red welt will disappear in a day or two.



The ubiquitous bluebottle.



Don't over-do the sun in Australia.

Beach and sun safety

Sun protection is a very serious matter in Australia, as the Ultra Violet (UV) is very high at all times of the year. The UV exposure is at its greatest between 11am and 3pm so it's best to totally avoid skin exposure to the sun between these times, particularly children and the iridescently pale-skinned.

Insider's tip: Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world. It's common for first-time visitors to underestimate the severity of the Aussie sun and wind up sunburnt, which is no fun!
– **Lauren Cardwell**

The key to being sun-safe in Australia is Slip, Slop, Slap

- Slip on clothing that covers arms and legs.
- Slap on a hat.
- Slop on sunscreen.
- A couple more S's from us: seek shade and slide on sunglasses.

Try to wear a broad-spectrum sunscreen of at least SPF30 and reapply it regularly, particularly after swimming or sweating.

Tips for bushwalking in Australia

There are plenty of perfectly safe opportunities to walk in the bush in Australia. There are national parks close to all of Australia's major cities which have well-marked tracks that end with a Devonshire Tea at the local café. That's taking a walk in the bush.

Then there's bushwalking. You call it hiking, rambling, tramping, fell-walking, orienteering or similar.

If there's any element of self-sufficiency required, if you're going to a remote location, or the terrain will be particularly rugged, if there's no cell phone signal or means of calling for assistance, if the weather is likely to be extreme (hot or cold) – you are bushwalking.

The problem is being able to identify how your walk in the bush suddenly became a bushwalk and now you're in deep do-do!

Plenty of people (locals too) have set off for a day bushwalking in one of those parks close to the city and become lost or stuck. So it pays to be a little prepared – even for the cake walks!

Essentials for bushwalking

Don't take on "Everest", pick walks that are within your fitness capacity and level of experience. Just because "walk" is part of the title doesn't mean anyone can do it.

Try to walk in groups of at least four, that way if you do get in trouble you can split into safe groups of two - one to get help (if you can't call for it) and one to stay put.

Make sure your clothing and footwear are up to the task; thongs, sandals and wedge heels are not suitable footwear, think runners or proper walking boots.

Take extra clothing to be prepared for a sudden change in weather. Also, don't be a hero - turn back if the weather starts closing in or if things are starting to feel out of control.

Insider's tip:** If you are going to remote areas or in national parks on your own, inform a park ranger or visitor information officer and make sure you pack a small first-aid kit. – **Michaela Fantinel



Bushwalking: Be prepared.

If you're planning a walk in Sydney's Blue Mountains National Park, free PLBs are available for loan when you register your walk with NSW Police or the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS). You can pick one up from the NPWS Office in Blackheath between 9am - 4pm or after hours from the Police Stations at Katoomba (phone 02 4782 8199) and Springwood (phone 02 4751 0299).

Advice on bushfires in Australia

Australians' love of the bush means large tracts of natural vegetation lap at the fringes of our cities and tentacles can reach surprisingly deep into suburbia.



Firefighters fighting fire with fire.

Despite that, it's important to note that most Australians only experience bushfires via the nightly news, because they live in urban centres far from any threat... which is where you're most likely to be, too.

If you're in a city-fringe area or country town that comes under threat from a bushfire you'll know about it. There's an elaborate and extensive network of alarms.

Police and emergency services will come street-to-street making announcements; TV and radio are full of the news.

How to survive a bushfire

The key to bushfire survival is **don't be in one**. If you have the opportunity to leave, do so. Get out of its way, and make the decision to go early so there's no panic.

That decision is easy for visitors – harder for residents who may choose to stay and fight the fire to save their homes, often with tragic consequences. No-one will think less of you for leaving. Residents have made the choice to live among the bush and accept the risks.

Travellers and bushfires

The biggest danger to your safety is if you are in a rural area, maybe travelling between towns, or bush camping in a national park, and you encounter a fire.

If you see smoke in the distance **before** you smell it, the wind is blowing it away from you and you're most likely safe – for now.



If you smell smoke before you see it, it could be heading your way. Now is the time to switch on the radio or go to the nearest town and make enquiries.

- Is it a threat?
- Which direction is it moving?
- How fast is it moving?
- What is the weather forecast?
- Do you need to make plans to leave?
- Where should you go?

Don't be the one who started the fire

Open fires are banned during the hot dry months of summer unless you have a permit, which means no campfires.

During especially dangerous periods there may be a "total fire ban", which means you can't even light a barbecue in the outdoors, so it's cooking on the stove in the mobile home, or takeaway only.

Large roadside signs will indicate the level of fire danger and the restrictions in place. If in doubt, check with the local fire brigade in the nearest town, the council, or the person behind the counter at the general store.



Take these signs seriously.

Don't throw lit cigarette butts from car windows

If it is permitted to have an open fire, make sure it is completely extinguished before leaving it unattended.

Driving Around Australia

Driving around Australia seems such a simple undertaking but like many things in this great brown land, it's not without major risk and should not be attempted without a great deal of preparation.

Australia is big - really big!

Many visitors are unprepared for the size of the place! Maps are deceiving and what looks like a reasonably short drive, like London to Manchester, is actually the same as London to Moscow!



This is how big it is, not where it is. Reddit.



Outback driving requires special skills.

Road conditions are equally deceiving. Where you might expect a European-style motorway between major cities, you encounter single-lane dual carriageway.

As you'll see if you read our "Driving the east coast of Australia" article online, if you did nothing but drove non-stop for 8 hours a day, past every town and sightseeing opportunity on the road from Melbourne to Cairns, it would still take at 5 days to complete the journey! There are some Aussies who started the journey in 1990 and still haven't reached Cairns (mostly they're now living in Byron Bay). To do it properly, stopping and enjoying the places you find along the way, you'll need at least a month.

For this you you'll need a relatively reliable vehicle, and an allowance for fuel and accommodation along the way. This is why renting a campervan/mobile home is a popular option and much more reliable than buying another traveller's clapped-out van at a flea market.

Insider's tip: Campervan companies in Australia are desperately looking for someone to relocate those campervans back to their original home base and are willing to offer incredible deals for someone to do it! With a bit of flexibility on your end, you can score a 4-6 berth campervan for \$1 a day! – **Max & Oksana**

Outback driving: How to do it Safely

The temptation to get well off the beaten path and discover the “true” outback Australia is irresistible, but you better have a good understanding of the conditions if you expect to make it to your destination - alive!

The second-hand Kombi you picked up in Coogee is ok if you're sticking to the more-populated regions, but there's a reason 4WD's are everywhere in the outback: few regular vehicles can survive the conditions.

Remote travel life-saving rules

Without doubt there are two rules which will save your life in remote regions: always let someone know where you are going and when you expect to arrive, and always stay with your vehicle.

If you have no experience with a 4x4 and are renting one, make sure you know how to engage the four wheel drive - failure to do so has led to some pretty embarrassing “rescue” stories.

Preparation - here's the list of basics to take with you:

- **Maps** of the area - as detailed and as current as possible
- **A compass**, matches and fire-lighter blocks
- **Water:** lots of it, if you are unsure - take more
- **Food:** Enough for each person for two days
- **Clothes:** Two changes of clothes, one for the heat, one for the cold
- **Medicine:** put together a kit with bandages, bandaids, antiseptic cream, sunblock, a broad-spectrum antibiotic, insect repellent, paracetamol, and anything else you feel you may need - which hopefully you won't need
- **Tools:** A complete set, especially a jack that works (and know how to work it). If going to the remote Outback, take two jacks and preferably two spare tyres (before you set out, make sure your spare tyres are correctly inflated), spare globes, spare fanbelt, spare fuses, and at least one big torch and a long handled shovel.

- **Radio:** One that can pick up at least one station, to keep across changes in the weather.
- For the remote outback a 2-way **HF radio** with Flying Doctor and Telstra frequencies is essential. Mobile phone signal coverage is limited at best and generally non-existent, so you may want to think about renting a satellite phone
- A loud **whistle**.



It's a long way to anywhere.

Insider's tip: Oz is pretty massive, so don't land and expect to cover Sydney to Cairns in a week... get clued up on the travel ties between places and leave at least 4 weeks to cover the East Coast comfortably. – **Chris Stevens**

Outback Survival Tips

If you are stranded for any reason the following may help:

- Rig a lean-to shelter and stay in it during the heat of the day
- Dig a hole under the car and place your water & food in to keep it cool, it will be cooler under there than in your car
- Build a small fire and have some green growth on hand to place on top to create thick smoke, keep it going day and night. This could attract the attention of planes, other vehicles or stockmen in the area
- Ration your food & water - you do not know how long it will have to last
- Use your rear vision mirror to signal passing planes by flashing it into the sun
- Keep your clothes on as they will protect you against exposure - cold and hot

Finally, don't panic. A ground signal for motorists needing help is simple and the following two codes should be used:

- **SOS** - means that a motorist has a survival problem.
- **X** - means that the motorist is unable to proceed.



Both signals should be large enough to be identified from a reasonable height and should be formed preferably in white material.

***Insider's tip:** If you want to experience Australia at its best, travel during the shoulder season – September-October and March-April are the best times to enjoy the best of Australia's beaches, rainforests, and other adventures. You'll still meet a ton of travelers without having to pay the premium! – Anna Phipps*

About the author:

Phil Sylvester

Is the chief wordsmith at WorldNomads.com. A news reporter in a former life, he travelled all over Australia chasing ambulances and asking people “how do you feel?”, and got to see and experience a fair amount of this wide brown land.

Phil also volunteered as a lifesaver for many years, but has never seen a shark. He has seen lots of those hairy legged huntsman spiders and isn't afraid of using a jam jar and a sheet of paper to capture the bugger so his wife will stop freaking out!

Phil's Australian-ness can be tested by asking him the answer to the song lyric question “Am I ever going to see your face again?” (try it on any Aussie you meet.)

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Adventure Tours Australia is an award-winning travel company specialising in small group tours, bringing together like-minded people for over 20 years. They know how to get to the heart of a destination with the best guides in the business.

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With hostels in every state, YHA is the largest backpacker accommodation provider in Australia and a great place to meet backpackers from around the world. YHA Australia is a membership-based, not-for-profit association.

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