

Preface

The real reason why I've chosen Australia as my special topic is that at first I didn't know which topic I should choose anyway.

Then I remembered a book I read when I was at the age of twelve. This book was about Australia and its culture. I remembered all that beautiful pictures about the landscape there, the old black wrinkled gray curly haired man only dressed with a loincloth, the jumping crazy kangaroos with their babies in their bags. I suddenly had also fond memories of the cute delightful koalas.

Suddenly I knew which special topic I should choose. Australia, the real country of unlimited opportunity. I bought five books and the more I read the more I got interested in that fantastic continent. So I sought all my encyclopedias and also started searching the internet for further information. I found so much that I had to reduce it, otherwise it would go beyond the scope of this special topic. I hope the following points are sufficiently compiled and developed. As far as I'm concerned, Australia will surely be one of my next holiday destinations. Perhaps it will become my new home – any time.

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Australia

Introduction

The largaeat island and he smallest continent in the world contains an immense variety of different landscapes in an area of 7,682,300 km². The continent separates two great oceans – the Pacific to the

east and the Indian Ocean to the west. There are enormous areas which are arid or semi-desert and mostly uninhabited. This is the reason why Australia has one of the highest urbanizations of the world. Nearly 88 per cent of its 18,3 million inhabitants live in cities. Nowadays about 95 per cent of Australia's inhabitants are whites. Another 4 per cent are Asian and the rest, only 1 per cent, are Aborigines.

Australia is a rather young nation, the first settlers were convicts, so their mentality is much more open and sociable. The nonchalant addresses G'day (Good day) or Hi are thoroughly usual. Australian are uncomplicated hosts and like inviting other people to their homes. Their table manners are like the British one's but much fewer formal.

The Australian feel a kind of hate-love relationship to the British, because Australia has been a British colony until 1901. They simply call them 'Poms' (from *pompous*).

History

An awareness of Terra Australis already existed in legends of the Inca, the Greek and the ancient Egyptian. They all told about a great land in the south. Japanese, Indonesian and Chinese may have landed on Australia's northern coast before the first Europeans arrived but there is no evidence of this. Individual discoveries by the Spaniards and Portuguese in the mid-16th-century are possible but the first sure reports date from the beginning of the 17th century.

In 1605 the Dutch Willem Janszoon was the first who reached the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north of the continent. In 1616 Dirk Hartog set foot on the Australian West Coast. In the following decades, the Dutch repeated their expeditions to the West Coast and in 1644 they named it New Holland. Between 1642 and 1644 Abel Tasman sailed round Australia. He discovered Van Diemensland, today's Tasmania and New Zealand. Because of the unprofitableness of the West Coast, the Dutch soon lost their interests in the continent.

In 1707 the Englishman James Cook landed at the fertile East Coast. He took possession of it for Great Britain and named it New South Wales. In 1788 the British founded their first colony of convicts nearby Sydney. This was the first step of white settlement on the Australian continent. The convicts, who had to work on farms, were brought to Australia until 1868 but much earlier namely 1793 the first free colonists landed nearby Sydney. From 1827 Great Britain claimed not only the colonized coastal strip but the whole continent. After 1820 the name Australia was accepted worldwide.

In the mid-19th-century the centre of Australia was discovered with several expeditions. Great Britain founded the colonies South and West Australia. Victoria, Tasmania and Queensland were split off from New South Wales. In 1836 Melbourne and Adelaide were founded. Since 1823 a lot of voluntary colonists came to West Australia because of the great gold rush. In 1851 the gold rush also starts in New South Wales and Victoria.

In 1831 the allotment of land was stopped and in 1840 forced labor was abolished, so there was a free market for work and land in Australia. Between 1842 and 1850 a colonial self-government was established. In the last quarter of the 19th century a union of the six colonies (West Australia, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland) was demanded. In 1901 they founded, because of a royal proclamation, the Federal Commonwealth of Australia. The Australian

constitution was guided by the British and US-American ones. Soon the Labor Party, that was connected with the strong trade-union movement, became an important force in Australia's politic. Already in 1908 they got minimum wages, the eight-hours-day and public welfare for old people through. Protected duties were a guarantee for high wages. The Labor Party found an ally in the Libarate Party against the Opposition of the real estate oriented National Country Party of Australia (NCP). By a very strict immigration laws nonwhite people were kept away from Australia. The slogan therefore was White Australia. In 1911 Australia organized his own national defence and started to construct his own fleet. In World War I Australia took part on the side of Great Britain. In 1921 Australia got the mandates for the German possessions in the South Pacific south of the equator. By now they are independent states or part of other independent states. In 1933 Australia claimed a sector of the antarctic continent.

In World War II Australia also fought at the side of Great Britain. After the downfall of Singapore Australia was directly threaten by Japan.

In 1945 Australia became foundation member of the United Nations. Between 1947 and 1958 Heardisland, MacDonald Island, the Cocoislands and Christmas Island were put in charge of the Federal Commonwealth of Australia. In 1951 joined the ANZUS-pact. Between 1954 and 1977 Australia was member of the SEATO. In the Korea War Australian soldiers took part as UN-armed forces. In the Vietnam War Australia fought at the side of South Vietnam.

Society

Gouvernement

Until a short time ago, the monarch of Great Britain was head of state in Australia. He was represented by a General Gouvernor.

Australia is a confederation of six federal states and two territories. The single states have a certain degree of independence.

In Australia everyone older than 18 is bound by law to vote.

Economy

Australia has big occurrences of petroleum, natural gas, coal, gold, copper, uranium, iron ore and bauxite. More than the half of Australia's export contains raw material. Australia has a high developed agricultural sector. It produces a lot of milk, wheat, sugar, beef and sheep flesh. The part of the industry in Australias economy ammounts to 22 per cent.

The Asian economic space gets more and more important for Australias economy because the protectionism of the European Union makes it very hard to reach the European market. In the eighties the Australian government has started a reform to improve Australias economy. State-owned companies were privatized and trade restrictions abolished. Australia adopted the American way of resisting a global economy.

The national currency is the Australian Dollar.

Education

The general education is business of the federal states. They are financed by contributions by the state. Compulsory education lasts eleven years in Australia. For pupils who live far away from a school, it's possible to take part of the lessons with a radio set.

One fourth of all school-aged people go to private schools. There are colleges and universities in all federal states. The school year is splitted up into 4 parts at 10 weeks each.

Public Health

Australia has a high standard in medical supply and in medical institutions. The public Health System Medicare, which is financed with taxes, pays all costs that arise in public health institutions. Private health insurance also increases.

Aborigines

Introduction

The word was coined by the Latin and was originally used as designation for the Latins. It means original inhabitants but is mainly used for the original inhabitants of Australia.

The traditions of the Aborigines point out that that they have lived in Australia since they exist. Anthropologists however assume that they emigrated from Asia and came to Australia between the 30th and 70th pre-Christian millenium. As proof scientists say that the sea level at this time was relatively low, so that there was a direct connect between Australia and the Asian mainland.

Culture

This first Australians were nomads. They lived as hunters and accumulators. They even had some agricultural knowledge. For example they used fire to speed up the growth of some plants Kangaroos and other hunted animals prefer. They also sowed grass seeds to speed up the development of meadows. They had a few simple but also some genius tools such as spears, windtubes, bobbin coi, water containers out of animal skin and binded mats and bags out of grass. They also manufactured canoes and rafts out of single undermined trunks with sails they weaved with grass. The division of labor followed after the sex. Male Aborigines hunted the big animals and the Female collected plants and hunted for small animals.

In contrast to the rather simple developed economy and thechnology the Aborigines had a very complex social structure and one of the most extesive beliefs worldwide. Everything revolved round a mystic complex called Dreamtime. This was an all-embracing rough draft, that included the past, the present and the future and even the time at the beginning of time. In this time mystic beings had formed the land and colonized it with men, animals and plants.

The Aboriginal social system was completely independent of material ownership. More important were values like selflessness or the adherence of social and religious duties. The status of an individual was defined in his religious position. Trade was very important for the Aborigines. They had a net of trading routes that spanned all the continent. Often they traded with sacred objects that had an immense social and religious meaning for them. This was the way they maintained and promoted the relationship and harmony to other groups.

When White Man came

When the Europeans founded their first settlement the Aborigines have already populated and used the whole continent by adapting on the different geographic and climatic circumstances. It is supposed that the population rate of the Aborigines at this time amounted to 300.000 and one million people and that they had more than 200 different languages.

The arrival of the European was a catastrophe for the Aborigines. Two completely different worlds suddelny collided. The capitalism oriented world of the European and the socialism related one of the Aborigines. Soon they were driven out of the fertile coastal area. A lot of them died because put up resistance against the expulsion. But much more died because of diseases, the Europeans brought in. In Tasmania and the South East of Australia the Aborigines completely disappeared. In the first century of white settlement the population of the Aborigines dropped dramatically. This tendency was supported by Whites who brutally maltreated them or so-called missionary work. In 1920 the population rate only amounted to 60.000 persons.

Until the sixties most of the remaining Aborigines stayed in rural areas. In the following years they settled more and more in municipal areas. They were often suspiciously looked upon and discriminated. In the beginning of seventies the social standing of the Aborigines was very little. Since 1967, because of a referendum that gave the government the force to handle for the Aborigines, the situation gradually got better. Soon the Aborigines claimed some areas with particularly cultural and religious meaning. At the census of 1991 there were 238.492 Aborigines and 26.902 Torres-Stait islander counted. This enormous increase may be lead back to a high birth rate and a re-discovery to their own identity.

Most of the Aborigines nowadays live in New South Wales and Queensland. More than 70 per cent of them in cities. The traditional way of live of the Australian Aborigines is acutely threaten even though their culture is even taught in school. The number of Aborigines that still live with that old traditions is nowadays just about 10.000.

Today the Aborigines are still confronted with social and economic disadvantages. They have a much lower life expectancy than Whites, a much higher unemployment rate and a lower income.

specific culture

Corroborees

Corroborees are a combination of dance, singing and ceremonial act. They are different from group to group and are performed because of several reasons:

- in favour of rain or fine weather
- at the funeral of members of the group
- before hunting
- for magical sing of weapons
- for bewitching of a partner

There also exist competitions between different groups, where dances are assessed and honoured with prizes.

To inform other groups about the arrangement of a Corroboree the Aborigines use wooden messenger-sticks on which the exact date, place and the number of participants is painted. Then a courier is sent to the other tribes to deliver the message.

In the beginning of Corroborees Humpys (plain huts in which the dancer are undisturbed for putting on make-up, painting their bodies, changing their clothes and preparing themselves for the ceremony) are built.

At Corroborees with no religious background all members of the group are allowed to watch and to take part. At religious ones, the presence is strictly forbidden for women and not initiated boys. If they watch anyway, they are punished to death. This ceremonies are often either Initiations of boys or topsecret reproduction rites.

There are also ritual celebrations for women, where either none or only very respected men are allowed to watch.

Initiation

At this occasion, holy and secret dances are showed from the older to the younger generation. An initiation is one of the most important event for Aborigines.

The first step begins in puberty and lasts for a longer period. The youths are brought to places where during the Dreamtime creative acts were done. For the initiated youth his childhood ends. After the celebration they come back as adequate members of the group. Other steps follow in the followin years. The more steps an Aborigine completes the higher is his position in the traditional hierarchy.

Dreamtime

For Aborigines dreaming is not something unreal it's rather thinking or having ideas. For them dreaming is very real. It's also basis for their entire world view. After ther belief in the beginning, at Dreamtime, the world was a large plain without any landscape and life. But there already existed a kind of ghost, as a strangepower, who anytime took shape. Since then mystic beings roamed through the land. This beings formed landscaped and created nature.

The end of Dreamtime was there when the mystic beings left the earth.

Preferences

Books

- Australia Perspectives (© by the Ernst Klett Verlag (1992), ISBN 3-12-513740-3)
- Wandering Girl (by Glenyse Ward, © by G. Ward (1988), published by VIRAGO PRESS, ISBN 0-86068-185-8)
- Walkabout (by James Vincent Marshall, © by J.V. Marshall (1959), ISBN 0-14-031292-7)
- Down Under (by Patricia Fenner, © by Cornelson Verlag (1989), ISBN 3-464-05150-1)

CD-Rom

- Microsoft Encarta 1994
- Microsoft Encarta 1997
- Microsoft Weltatlas

Internet

World Wide Net

- Australien Bureau of Statistics (<http://www.statistics.gov.au>)
- Australasian Legal Information Institute (<http://www.austlii.edu.au>)
- National Library of Australia (<http://www.nla.gov.au>)

UseNet

Thanx a lot to Perry Wheeler, an Australian student of the University of Melbourne who gave me some informations about the Australian mentality and culture.