

Australia, island continent located southeast of Asia and forming, with the nearby island of Tasmania, the Commonwealth of Australia, a self-governing member of the Commonwealth of Nations. The continent is bounded on the north by the Timor Sea, the Arafura Sea, and the Torres Strait; on the east by the Coral Sea and the Tasman Sea. The capital of Australia is Canberra, and the largest city is Sydney; both are located in the southeast.

The Commonwealth of Australia is made up of six states and two territories. The states and their capitals are New South Wales (Sydney), Victoria (Melbourne), Queensland (Brisbane), South Australia (Adelaide), Western Australia (Perth), and Tasmania (Hobart). The territories and capitals are the Australian Capital Territory (site of the national capital, Canberra) and the Northern Territory (Darwin). The first inhabitants of Australia were the Aboriginal people. The most important of the rivers that flow toward the eastern coast are the Burdekin, Fitzroy, Hunter, and Nepean-Hawkesbury. Most of the major natural lakes of Australia contain salt water. The great salt lakes in South Australia are — Lake Eyre, Lake Torrens, Lake Frome, and Lake Gairdner. Australia is the driest of the inhabited continents. Australia is rich in mineral resources, notably bauxite, coal, diamonds, gold, iron ore, mineral sands, natural gas, nickel, petroleum, and uranium. The best-known animals of Australia are the kangaroos, which include about 50 species, koala, wombat, Tasmanian devil and dingo. Australia's system of government is a federal parliamentary democracy. The constitution of Australia, which became effective in 1901, is based on British parliamentary traditions, and includes elements of the United States system. Australia is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations that chooses to recognize the British monarch as its own sovereign and, as such, its head of state. The head of government is the Australian prime minister, who is responsible to the Australian parliament. In 1768 Captain James Cook departed Britain in command of the ship Endeavour on a three-year expedition to the Pacific. Cook's subsequent voyages (in 1772 - 1775 and 1776 - 1779) helped to cement British claims, although French explorers also surveyed the eastern coast, including Jean-Francois Marie de Surville in 1769 and Marion Dufresne in 1772. Australia is a beautiful country and I would like to visit it but I will never have money for traveling there.