

## Bushwalking/Hiking in Australia

### Some things you need to know

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Many parts of Australia have conditions for hiking (which in Australia is known as Bushwalking) that are idyllic and that offer plenty of opportunity for challenging hikes and adventure. Australia has scenery, fauna and flora which are unique and one the best ways to see this wonderful and vast country is on foot.

#### Getting detailed information

We highly recommend walking with a local Bushwalking Club as they know the risks associated with the local area, what is required and, best of all, what to see.

There are many other useful sources of information including National Park staff and commercial tour operators who can help you with information about seasonal beauty and local conditions you might expect to encounter at the time of your visit.

Australia with its diverse climate and landforms is a great country for hiking. However there are some hazards which you need to be aware of before you set out to explore. Check the latest information for the area you wish to visit and then plan your trip to maximise your enjoyment of our wonderful natural areas and manage the risks to minimise the likelihood of injury or distress.

#### Weather conditions

Australia has a wide range of weather conditions. The continent is large and has tropical conditions in the north, dry desert in the centre and conditions ranging from dry to heavy rain and snow in the south. Some of these weather events can be severe and pose a threat to personal safety.

Northern Australia: Wet season, very heavy rain with flooding and some areas becoming inaccessible. Dry season can have high daytime temperatures.

Desert areas: Includes parts of Western Australia, Northern Territory, South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland. Summer temperature in these areas can exceed 45°C and almost certainly there will be no surface water.

However rain events when they occur in these places can cause dangerous flooding and areas can be isolated for several days.

South East Australia including Tasmania: Snow hail heavy rain (even in summer), temperatures of 40°C plus in summer.

Thunderstorms: Severe thunderstorms can occur anywhere in Australia.

Risks associated with weather: UV levels are often very high and can cause severe skin damage. Check the UV index on the Bureau of Meteorology website and be prepared to cover-up and use SPF 30+ sunscreen. Dehydration and heat stroke can be a consequence of activity in high temperatures. Hypothermia is a risk in wet cold conditions. Please heed local advice.

However many areas have pleasant stable weather at different times of the year. Where possible you are advised to check weather forecasts with the Bureau of Meteorology, [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

#### Sun protection

The Australian sun is very strong, especially in the summer months, and as a consequence Australia has one of the highest skin cancer rates in the world. Always wear a shirt, hat, sunglasses and SPF 30+ sunscreen lotion, even on cloudy days. If

spending the whole day outdoors, reapply sunscreen regularly. Stay out of the sun during the middle of the day when the sun is strongest. Make sure you drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration.

For more information visit the Cancer Council Australia <http://www.cancer.org.au/>

## **Bushfire**

Australians live with the risk of bushfires. The danger period in most parts of the country is from late spring to summer and during this time observe some simple safety precautions. Before setting out on a journey, inform yourself of bushfire risks through TV, radio and newspapers reports. When camping, use designated fireplaces and comply with warning signs and total fire bans. If you must light a fire, always extinguish it completely with water.

On days of extreme fire danger authorities may declare a Total Fire Ban covering either all or designated parts of a state. When a total fire ban is in force no fires can be lit in the open. Campfires and portable stoves of any kind are included in the ban and cannot be used in a tent or shelter. Severe penalties apply where someone lights of fire in the open on a day of total fire ban.

The most authoritative source of weather information, including fire danger information is the web site of Australian Government's Bureau of Meteorology at [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)

## **Availability of water**

Australia is one of the driest continents on earth. In the tropical areas of northern Australia water may be plentiful but availability will vary according to the time of year. In most western and central areas, including parts of South Australia potable surface water is almost nonexistent.

Mountain areas in the South East may have perennial streams but in dry years these can disappear. When planning a hike in an area always check with local authorities as to the availability of water.

If travelling by vehicle in remote locations always carry plenty of drinking water for emergencies.

## **Snakes**

Despite sharing our continent with about 140 species of land snakes, some equipped with extremely toxic venom, snakebite is more a fear than a reality. On average only 1-2 cases of snakebite a year result in death. Many more deaths from snake bite occur in Asia and Africa.

Unprovoked, snakes rarely attack humans. Although snakes cannot hear they can detect vibrations in the ground, so walk heavily to encourage them to instinctively flee from your path. If you do encounter a snake in your pathway, do not disturb it. Simply alert the other members of your party and give it a wide berth.

When bushwalking it is recommended that you always wear stout footwear and be observant. In areas where snakes are prevalent it is wise to wear long trousers and/or gaiters. When camping, use a tent with an integral floor and always zip up the doors. Use a torch at night.

## **Crocodiles**

Estuarine crocodiles (also know as saltwater crocodiles) can be found in waterways considerable distances from the coast in the Northern Territory and tropical areas of Western Australia and Queensland. Crocodiles also occur around offshore islands in these areas. These animals are extremely dangerous and all warning signs about them should be heeded.

## **Insects and Spiders**

While Australia has its share of these they are, in general, not a problem if protective clothing is worn. Malaria is not present in Australia however mosquitoes can carry and spread other diseases such as Dengue Fever and Ross River Virus. Where

mosquitoes are prevalent the best protection is to wear long pants and a long sleeved shirt, preferably of a light colour. Insect repellents containing DEET can be used on exposed skin.

### **Precautions**

Finally always tell someone about your planned excursion or route whether you are hiking or driving. You can easily do this online at [www.tripintentions.org](http://www.tripintentions.org) This is a free service provided for community benefit by the volunteer group Bush Search & Rescue Victoria.

In addition make sure you have extra food and water in case you are delayed or your vehicle breaks down in a remote location. Mobile (cell) phone coverage is limited to population centres. The emergency telephone number used in all parts of Australia is 000. If travelling or bushwalking in remote or difficult terrain it is advisable to carry a Personal Locator Beacon (sometimes referred to as an EPIRB) to obtain help in a life threatening situation. These can be hired from some National Park information centres and some Police Stations.

### **Come and enjoy the Australian Bush**

Although you need to be aware of them please don't let the hazards described above deter you from exploring the wide diversity of Australia's land forms on foot.

### **Some useful links**

Find a Club to walk with and information about bushwalking in each State <http://www.bushwalkingaustralia.org>

Information about Personal Locator Beacons <http://beacons.amsa.gov.au>

Tourism Australia - Australia Travel Tips [www.australia.com/articles/tips\\_hazards.aspx](http://www.australia.com/articles/tips_hazards.aspx)

Travel Tips [http://www.downunderonline.com/travel\\_tips\\_australia.htm](http://www.downunderonline.com/travel_tips_australia.htm)

National Parks service for each State or Territory:

New South Wales	<a href="http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks.htm">www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks.htm</a>
Australian Capital Territory	<a href="http://www.tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation">http://www.tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation</a>
Victoria	<a href="http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/">www.parkweb.vic.gov.au/</a>
Tasmania	<a href="http://www.parks.tas.gov.au">www.parks.tas.gov.au</a>
South Australia	<a href="http://www.atn.com.au/parks/saparks.html">www.atn.com.au/parks/saparks.html</a>
Western Australia	<a href="http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/">www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/</a>
Queensland	<a href="http://nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/index.php">http://nprsr.qld.gov.au/parks/index.php</a>
Northern Territory	<a href="http://www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/">www.parksandwildlife.nt.gov.au/</a>
Kakadu & Uluru	<a href="http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/">www.environment.gov.au/parks/</a>

### **Disclaimer**

*This document is intended to provide general advice only and will not cover each and every circumstance you may encounter.*

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## **Bushwalking: At a Natural Pace in a Natural Place**