

AUSTRALIAN

History

First Fleet

The European settlement of Australia started just over 200 years ago, on the 26th January 1788. The 'First Fleet', as it was called, was comprised almost entirely of convicts and military authorities. The convicts vastly outnumbered their military overlords. Fifty years after colonisation began, the convict and working class outnumbered the authorities almost nine to one. Convict transportation to Australia did not cease until 1853.

These early years of colonisation were hard and tough. The authorities had complete control over the convicts who, most naturally, resented such authority as they had been forced to come to the other side of the world, often because of petty crimes such as stealing a loaf of bread. Most convicts felt totally helpless in their plight.

'The little Aussie battler'

Even when convicts had served their time and were given land, it required a lot of hard work for the land to be made productive. It was as if the early Australian had simply swapped the military authority for the harshness of the land and climate.

Thus arose the concept of 'the little Aussie battler'. This term generally refers to the average Australian who, no matter how hard they work, will be kept in their lowly state by such things as employers, taxation, the harsh climate, etc. The whole idea is of having to work hard for long hours with little result. Even when the days of convict transportation finally ended in the 1850s, the Government authorities still found ways of getting the upper hand in the heady gold-rush days of the 1850s and following, by taxing people very highly.

Lack of Religion

To say that most early settlers were irreligious is an understatement. In fact, the chaplain who came out with the 'First Fleet' in 1788 was unable to get permission to even build a church, as it was not seen as a priority. Chaplains were put on a par with the military authorities.

Resultant Social Behaviour from this History

1. Mistrust of Authority

There is a widespread mistrust of authority in Australia. For instance, politicians are usually assumed to be telling lies. They will be perceived as doing things, not for the benefit of the people, but simply to stay in power. Respect for authority will come, not because of the person's position, but because of their competence. The Australian term for this is fair dinkum, which simply means there is no hypocrisy in a person. Australians find it very difficult to obey authority figures if they perceive that such people are simply 'throwing their weight around' because of their position, or are incompetent in their leadership position.

2. A Desire for All to be Equal

Australians are probably best known worldwide as a country of knockers. This term means to make an insulting or negative remark. There are two sides to this and it is important to understand the difference.

- Side A - Australians knock people who do well (bring down the tall poppies). Successful businessmen, politicians and others who have really succeeded need to be brought down to the same level as others (sports people though, are often the exception to this). Anyone who

excels in some way is seen to be trying to be “superior” to others and must be brought down to the level of his peers.

Most Australians went into a frenzy on winning the Americas Cup yachting race in 1983 - the first country to have won the cup outside of the United States in all the 130 years or so of the prestigious race’s history. The Australians had brought down the tall poppy - the Americans.

- Side B - Australians knock close friends, and this is often difficult for others to understand. Knocking or insulting close friends can actually be a form of endearment. For instance, the term ‘You idiot’ said with the right tone of voice and to a close friend, in the right context, would be understood by Australians to be an expression of friendship.

3. Casual about Life

Because of their English background, Australians have been able to observe the English and American cultures at close range. In relation to life in general, Australians would perceive the English as being too serious and the Americans as being too patriotic.

Ninety percent of Australia’s population lives on the coast or very near to it. Because of the warmer climate, the beach, swimming and outdoor recreation play an important role in Australian life. This has led to a casualness about life and a consequent sense of freedom about what they can and cannot do. This does not mean that Australians do not take anything seriously, for clearly many things are taken seriously, but that there is a general casualness about his life and lifestyle. Leisure is important to Australians. Most Australians are familiar with their country being called the land of the long weekend. Australians buy more four wheel drive vehicles than any other Western nation. This is a clear indicator of this ideal of leisure and getting away from the hustle and bustle of life (even if more than half of those vehicles never get off tar-sealed roads).

Other cultural factors that spring out of this casual approach to life are:

- A she’ll be right attitude to life. This means that it is pointless to get overly worried about situations because everything will turn out alright in the end. This attitude has probably been helped by the long history of stability since European settlement and the fact that Australia has never had a major war on her shores. In fact, Australia is known as the lucky country.
- Casual, but not open. Although Australians are very casual and easy-going in general, this is quite often only at a surface level.
- A strong regard for my rights. Because of the casualness about life, and the consequent freedom to pursue leisure, many Australians have a strong sense of personal freedom. Many Australians would say ‘I have the right to do what I like, when I like’. ‘If other people don’t quite see things the same way as me, that is their problem, not mine.’
- In a Field situation, most Australians would feel they have a clear right to express an opinion, whether they have been on the Field for five weeks or fifty years. Australians in general do not see this side of their character until they are removed from a totally Australian environment.

Positive Factors About Working with Australians

- Generally Australians are easy to get on with. Most Australians make friends easily. “Mateship” is important to Australians.

- Australians are non-threatening on the world scene. Antagonism has not generally built up against other nationalities.
- Major Australian cities are now extremely multicultural, and most urban Australians (particularly from Melbourne and Sydney) have a wide exposure to many different cultures. Immigration has happened very quickly with large communities of Italian, Greek, Yugoslav, Turkish, Dutch, Vietnamese and Chinese now settling in Australia.