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P A S S P O R T



Parliament House in Canberra

Capital: After a dispute over whether Sydney or Melbourne should be Australia's capital, the decision was made to build a new capital, Canberra, between the two. An international competition to design the new city was won by American architect Walter Burley Griffin and his wife Marion Mahony Griffin. Both had worked for Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago.

Geography: Australia is almost as big as the continental United States. It is the world's smallest



Uluru

continent, largest island and the only continent with a single country. Uluru, the world's largest monolith, sits near Australia's center. Australia is a wide-open land with beaches, mountains, rainforests, grass lands and deserts.

People: Over 24 million people live in Australia. Indigenous Australians have lived on the continent for over 60,000 years, making their culture the oldest in the world. Australia is one of the world's most ethnically diverse nations. Today, almost 50 percent of Australians were born overseas or have a parent who was born overseas.

Language: English is the official language. About 15 percent of Australians speak a language other than English at home. Mandarin,

Italian, Arabic, Cantonese, and Greek are the most commonly spoken. There are also over 100 Aboriginal languages and dialects.

Environment: Australia is the driest inhabited continent in the world and sustains unique plants and animals. Almost half the birds and more than 80 percent of Australia's flowers, fish, frogs, mammals and reptiles are found nowhere else.



Koala with joey

Seasons: Summer is from December to February and winter is from June to August because Australia is in the Southern Hemisphere.

Currency: The Australian dollar is the official currency. Australia was the first country to have a complete system of bank notes made from plastic.



Coat of Arms: The Coat of Arms consists of a shield (showing the badges of Australia's six states) between a kangaroo and an emu. The plant surrounding them is the golden wattle, Australia's national flower.

National Flag: The stars of the Southern Cross represent Australia's geographic position in the southern hemisphere. The large commonwealth star symbolizes the federation of states and territories, and the Union Jack embodies Australia's early ties to Great Britain.

