

# ETIQUETTE, EQUITY AND VALUES

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To help you transition to Australian culture we have brought together information that will assist you in some of the Etiquette, Equity and Values you will encounter during your stay.

One of the defining features of Australian society today is the cultural diversity of its people.

Another defining feature, with hard work and commitment, people without high-level connections or influential patrons can succeed.

All Australians are able to express their culture and beliefs and to participate freely in Australia's national life. Australia holds firmly to the belief that no-one should be disadvantaged on the basis of their country of birth, cultural heritage, language, gender or religious belief.

In order to maintain a stable, peaceful and prosperous community, Australians of all backgrounds are expected to uphold the shared principles and values that underpin Australian society.

## ETIQUETTE

### WHY ON THE LEFT?

When stopping on an escalator, or walking up stairs, always stick to the left and don't block other people from passing you by resting your hand on the right-side railing.

Equally, when walking on the footpath, try to stick to the left where possible.

Pay special attention when walking on bike-paths where it's not just a matter of politeness but also a matter of safety to stick to the left side.

### PERSONAL SPACE

Australia is the 9th least densely populated country in the world. Perhaps this is why, even in our busy cities, people like to have a fairly large circle of personal space.

It's considered rude to brush up against someone unless it's absolutely necessary (like on crowded public transport). When there is space available, try to stay at an arm's length away from people. If you have to invade that space for some reason, saying 'excuse me' or 'sorry' is appropriate.

Unless there's assigned seating, or a theatre is completely full, give strangers a couple of chair spaces between you and them.

### ELEVATORS AND LIFTS

Australians call them both elevators and lifts (just to mix it up) but the rules are simple.

It's polite to hold elevator doors for people who are approaching the elevator. It's also polite to ask them which floor they would like if you are standing closest to the buttons, especially if it's crowded and they may find it hard to reach over.

### GREETING PEOPLE YOU MEET

Don't feel as though you should say 'G'day' or use the word 'mate' a lot. Australians are aware of this stereotype and it can feel a little patronising coming from a visitor. Just saying hello and making good eye contact is fine. A handshake may be appropriate if you're meeting someone with whom you expect to have an ongoing relationship, like a new work colleague.

Even in formal situations, Australians tend to prefer first names. Calling someone (even your boss) Mr or Miss, Sir or Ma'am can sound a bit stiff.

### TRANSPORT

If you're waiting to board public transport, be sure to wait for everyone exiting to get out before you try to get on. Not waiting for people to exit first is something that will definitely irritate other travellers...especially early on a Monday morning.

Check out Guide to Public Transport Etiquette to find out more.

## **HOLD THE DOOR!**

If someone is within five steps of a door when you're walking through it, don't let it slam in their faces, hold it open for them. Of course, this will vary a little depending on the situation – use your best judgment. There are no special rules for males or females, simply hold doors for people who are near and maybe make an extra allowance for someone carrying something.

## **QUEUING**

In some cultures, queuing is optional or just not-a-thing. In Australia the queue is sacred. 'Pushing-in' in any situation – at a bar, a service desk or a cashier is considered the height of rudeness. Most of the time, it's pretty obvious where a queue begins and ends, but if you're in doubt, simply ask 'excuse me, is this the end of the line?'

## **IT'S SIMPLY JUST NOT NICE**

Turn away from other people and cover your nose and mouth with a tissue or your hand when coughing or sneezing. If this is not done, droplets of liquid containing germs from the nose and mouth will be spread in the air and other people can breathe them in, or the droplets can get onto food.

Spitting in public places is a big no-no and (perhaps we need to tell you this, perhaps we don't) public urination is considered an offense everywhere in Australia. Best not to do it.

## **IS THERE A BIN?**

It is not acceptable to drop garbage/rubbish outside this extends to indoors as well as outdoors. When eating anywhere, take rubbish to the bin when you're finished. In fact, if you can see bins, it's a sign that you're expected to use them.

Even in places like cinemas, where people are paid to clean up after you, it's polite to place your empty popcorn boxes in the bin on the way out.

It's simple NEVER EVER DROP LITTER OR CIGGERETTE BUTTS OUTSIDE!!!

## **PEOPLE IN JOBS**

No matter their job, treat people with equal respect and use 'please', 'thank you' and 'excuse me' with everyone. Never snap your fingers, whistle or yell at service staff to get their attention. As well as being considered rude, the standard of service you receive may drop a little...

## **TIME TO EAT**

In Australia the fork goes in the left hand and the knife goes in the right. In some cultures, it is considered polite to leave a little food on your plate, but Australia is not one of those cultures. Feel free to finish your meal.

## **MAKING FRIENDS**

There aren't many taboo topics in Australia, although if you've just met someone, you might want to avoid topics of race, religion, politics and sex until you know them better. If you're looking for sure and safe conversation starters, try the weather or sports.

## **PERSONAL HYGIENE**

It can become extremely hot in Australia which can cause you to perspire, so to help prevent body odour wear deodorant/antiperspirant. The smell of body odour is unpleasant and not socially acceptable. If possible, everybody should have a shower or a bath every day, wash your hair with shampoo at least once a week.

Brushing your teeth after each meal is the best way of making sure that gum disease and tooth decay are avoided. It is very important to clean teeth after breakfast and immediately before going to bed.

Washing hands with soap after going to the toilet and before preparing and/or eating food. During normal daily activities, such as working and playing, disease causing germs may get onto the hands and under the nails. If the germs are not washed off before preparing food or eating, they may get onto the food.

Dirty clothes should be washed with laundry soap before wearing them again. Hanging clothes in the sun to dry. The sun's rays will kill some disease-causing germs and parasites.

## EQUITY

### RESPECT FOR THE EQUAL WORTH, DIGNITY AND FREEDOM OF THE INDIVIDUAL

All Australians are free and equal and are expected to treat each other with dignity and respect. Australians reject the use of violence, intimidation or humiliation as ways of settling conflict in our society.

Commonwealth laws prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, sex, disability and age in a range of areas of public life under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975, Sex Discrimination Act 1984, Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the Age Discrimination Act 2004. The Australian Human Rights Commission is responsible for handling complaints under these laws.

### EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW

All Australians are equal under the law. This means that nobody should be treated differently from anybody else because of their race, ethnicity or country of origin; because of their age, gender, marital status or disability; or because of their political or religious beliefs. Government agencies and independent courts must treat everyone fairly.

Being treated equally means that getting a job or being promoted must be on the basis of a person's skills, ability and experience, not their cultural background or political beliefs. It also means that people cannot be refused service in a shop or hotel or other service facility because of their race, colour, religion, gender or marital status.

### EQUALITY OF MEN AND WOMEN

Men and women have equal rights in Australia. Jobs and professions are open equally to women and men. Men and women can serve in the military and both can also hold positions in government.

## VALUES

### SHARED VALUES

Although Australia's migrants have come from many different cultural and religious backgrounds, they have successfully settled in Australia and integrated into the broader community. Australia, in turn, has been enriched by the contributions they have made socially, culturally and economically.

An important feature of Australian society today is not only the cultural diversity of its people, but the extent to which they are united by an overriding and unifying commitment to Australia.

Australians put aside their individual differences in the interests of living together as neighbours.

Within the framework of Australia's laws, all Australians have the right to express their culture and beliefs and to participate freely in Australia's national life. At the same time, everyone is expected to uphold the principles and shared values, as outlined in the introduction, that support Australia's way of life.

### LAWS AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Community behaviour in Australia is governed by a combination of formal laws and informal social customs.

All people in Australia must obey the nation's laws or face the possibility of criminal and civil prosecution. People are also expected to generally observe Australian social customs, habits and practices even though they are not normally legally binding.

Australian laws are made by the Australian Commonwealth, state and territory parliaments. The police have the job of keeping peace and order in the community and to bring people they believe have broken the law before courts of law. People in their local communities and neighbourhoods also help each other in the event of trouble and report anything unusual or suspicious to the local police station.

Australia has a national police force called the Australian Federal Police, which investigates crimes against federal laws including drug trafficking, illegal immigration, crimes against national security and crimes against the environment. All states of Australia and the Northern Territory have their own police forces, which deal with crimes under state or territory laws. Policing in the Australian Capital Territory is undertaken by the Australian Federal Police.

Although police officers may arrest people and give evidence in court, they do not make the final decision on whether or not people are guilty of crimes. This is decided by the courts.

Police and the community have good relations in Australia. You can report crimes and seek assistance from the police. If you are questioned by police, remain calm, be polite and cooperative.

## **FREEDOMS**

All Australians are entitled to a number of fundamental freedoms (within the bounds of the law), including speaking freely and openly, joining associations, holding meetings, worshipping their chosen religions and moving throughout Australia without restrictions.

### **FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

All Australians are free, within the bounds of the law, to say or write what they think about Australian governments or about any other subject or social issue as long as they do not endanger people, make false allegations or obstruct the free speech of others.

The same applies to Australian newspapers, radio and television and other forms of media. Australians are free to protest the actions of government and to campaign to change laws.

Freedom of speech allows people to express themselves and to discuss ideas. There are laws that protect an individual's good name against false information or lies. There are also laws against inciting hatred against others because of their culture, ethnicity or background.

### **FREEDOM OF RELIGION**

All Australians are free to follow any religion they choose, so long as its practices do not break any Australian law. Australians are also free to not follow a religion. Religious intolerance is not acceptable in Australian society.