

At the end of their AFS exchange in Australia, we asked some recent AFSers from the USA to answer two questions:

- ❑ What elements of your host culture, compared to US culture, did you find most difficult to adjust to in the areas of family, school and/or social life?
- ❑ Please note any advice you would like to share with AFSers destined for your host country.

Here are some of their responses:

How Australians think life should go and how they lived was a whole lot different than US culture so adjusting to that was really difficult but eventually I adjusted. Be open to anything; Australia is a huge country with many different cultures and many different people, all of whom can open your mind to the world if you let them.

**Jonathan, Year, 2009**

Even though Australia may seem very similar to the USA, it is still very different. Often over there, talking to other AFS students from other places they would ask me "why Australia, they speak English?" But for me it was not to learn another language, it was to experience another culture and have a bit of a change in my life. Over all it was a great experience and I am glad I did it.

**Sara, Semester, 2008**

Everyone was very laid back and friendly. No one backed down from talking to me...I was glad I was talked to a lot, made me feel comfortable from the beginning.

**Andy, Summer, 2008**

Get out of your comfort zone! Don't ever turn down an offer, even if it is a trip to the grocery store. Anything will help build relationships.

**Jessica, Summer, 2008**

I found it hard to adjust to the food and the time they ate. Everyone seemed to eat a late dinner around seven thirty. It was also hard to adjust to the lack of produce; in California we don't realize how lucky we are agriculturally. The cost of living was also hard to adjust to; everything in Australia is so expensive.

**Justine, Semester, 2008**

In the beginning of my trip I wasn't sure how to react to everyone I was surrounded by. They were so much more easygoing than anyone I have ever met.

**Jessica, Summer, 2008**

I loved how everyone in Australia was open and not

afraid to be themselves. All my "mates" taught me how to accept myself and they taught me to take risks and think for myself. They are very loving people and I miss them every day.

**Taylor, Semester, 2007**

Speak up! Be friendly the very first days of school and talk to everyone; if you don't start like that then odds are you will never be able to muster the courage.

**Austin, Semester, 2007**

You must have a sense of humor. Australians like to joke with you, they are not being mean; it's just their culture. You must be open-minded and outgoing. Australians generally do not tolerate arrogant people. Always smile to strangers!! Australians are very outspoken and say what is on their mind. At first I found this very hard to get used to since I was not used to this but at the end of my exchange I was just like all the Aussies.

**Patrick, Semester, 2007**

Australia is an extremely relaxed country that I can only describe as compatible and welcoming.

**Brittany, Year, 2005**

Be open-minded. I was put in a tiny town in the middle of the outback that was primarily an aboriginal town. All you could see for miles was red dust. But I learned to appreciate the area and the people. You'll learn a lot more if you go in with an open mind.

**Paige, Summer, 2005**

Be open for anything. Australians are welcoming and friendly. They love to have a good time and joke around. Don't get offended by their jokes, they're only out of love. I've never met a friendlier group of people in my life...It's really easy to jump right in. Socially you will almost certainly have to take the initiative and push your way into



## Country Quotes: Australia

a social life, but it is well worth it to be outgoing. Fill up your schedule--either become involved with a school group (or a number of them) or sign up for some extracurricular activities...For me it was actually most difficult to relax. From my experience, Australia has a very laid back, friendly culture and it was strange at first to find complete strangers offering a sunny 'hello' on the street just because they were passing. Also, being a native English speaker, the difficulty I had understanding Australian English was baffling. There is a lot of slang and different words for common objects. A simple conversation would teach me a number of new words. It was a little like learning a different language.

**Ruth, Semester, 2004**

Australia is very similar to the US in terms of customs and culture. The food was hard for me to get used to, because my family at home doesn't eat a lot of meat. I found that it was hard not to have a set schedule, the Aussies are very laid back and relaxed about time, but it grew to become my favorite aspect of their culture.

**Elizabeth, Summer, 2004**

The Australians in general are very sarcastic all the time. They don't take their common banter to heart and neither should you. They're just having a good time, and having a go at you is really a way of them saying they're comfortable with you. It's a sign of friendship really.

**Tessa, Semester, 2003**

I was a vegetarian before I left, but all Australians eat in the rural area is beef and mutton. I hope people that go there love their protein. Also, you need to learn to be outgoing and almost everyone in Australia will love you.

**Amanda, Semester, 2003**

Enjoy every minute of it. Really try to connect with your family. Australian's are amazing, friendly, and accepting people.

**Ashley, Summer, 2003**

Don't expect too much out of others. You have to work at enjoying yourself and making the best out of good/bad situations. Learn to adjust and be cooperative with your family. Enjoy the relaxed Australian culture and humor! Have fun and you'll gain so many new friends.

**Sabrina, Summer, 2003**

Lingo was hard to adjust to. The hardest part about going on an exchange is going out on your own and becoming independent about things. Research your country and do the hard work, it helps! Preparation is

the key when going abroad!

**Miranda, Summer, 2002**

Most difficult was being in the sun. I am very fair skinned and constantly worrying about burning. Next was my family's lifestyle, we lived right on the beach and their attitudes were more laid back. Australia is an exciting place with thousands of different activities to partake in. Its landscape makes several adventures and lifestyles. Some say Australia is a "Little America." And in some ways it is, but it is so much more. The people you meet the school, activities all have specific differences and attitudes that make Australia stand out. Go visit it and see! A whole continent to explore!

**Karina, Year, 2002**

I felt that the USA and Australia had a lot in common and on the other hand a lot of differences. I wouldn't say this was difficult but Australia is full of many cultures. They don't have one set "culture"; their culture is made up by everyone else's cultures. That was different for me.

**Amy, Semester, 2001**

School was hard. They seem a bit more relaxed and wear uniforms. My family was very laid back and very close knit. Socially kids are more independent than [in the US] and it is a bit of a shock sometimes. Try everything. You have to take sarcasm well because Aussies make fun of each other and "stir" each other up, so a good sense of humor is a must. Be able to take quick showers because of water restrictions. You usually have to invite yourself places because Aussies won't think you're interested.

**Kaye, Semester, 2001**

In [Australia] I had to go to an all-girls school with uniforms. At my home in the US I have a co-ed free dress school. It was hard to find friends because I couldn't just "judge" a person by the way they dressed. I actually had to get to know someone; that was an awesome factor of my school.

**Brittany, Semester, 2001**

At school the girls and boys didn't hang out with each other. In California I mix up with boys and girls. It was hard on my social life not being able to drive. But after a while I got to know the bus schedule. When bringing a gift for your host family, try to ask them before you leave if they want to try anything from your home country. Ask for specific items maybe that they saw on movie or something, even if it's just a newspaper or magazine.

**Theresa, Semester, 2001**