**A Guide to Understanding Aussies & Aussie English**

**July 2001**

The Australian way-of-life, sense of humour, perspective & language is often a complete mystery to those visiting our sunburnt shores. We are variously described as laconic, laid-back or casual.

Much of what makes the species 'Aussie-a-saurus-rex' unique, is its evolution from a society based on 'mateship'. The 'new' country was more new than anyone could ever have imagined! Animals that hopped, furry animals with duck-bills, big-birds that can't fly, spiders, crocs and snakes; not to mention natives throwing sticks that return to sender! This land was one hell of a culture shock to the European visitors!!!

Historians believe a code of mutual aid, or mateship - 'mates stick-up for mates'- was necessary to survive in the early days of discovery and occupation in a harsh, and to the Europeans, strange land. With any hope of re-supply many months away, the new arrivals had to work as a group for any to survive.

The use of the word mate was widespread by the 1890s, and is often linked with the harsh conditions on the Australian frontier and colourful goldfield towns. It is to reaffirm our egalitarian backgrounds that Aussies greet everyone they meet with "G'day mate, ow-yer-goin'?" Translation: Good Morning Sir. How are you today?

The other explanation for why we call everyone mate is that we are a nation of lazy bastards, all just really hopeless with names!

The idea of group solidarity - mateship - is a recurring theme in Aussie relationships. This often results in a type of behaviour which, on the surface - or to those uninitiated in the ways of Oz - seems counter-productive to group harmony. But, when the underlying code is deciphered, the behaviour serves to increase an isolated individual's adhesion and affiliation with the group. […]

This helps in :  
· maintaining group coherence by respecting each other’s ability, not their 'position',   
· promotes democratic processes by reminding all that no one is better than the other or more valued than the group,   
· Confirming the individuals acceptance into the 'mates circle.'

The ultimate accolade or mark of acceptance from an Aussie is …"yeah, he's not a bad bloke" , rising to …he's 'a good/top bloke' or she's a 'top bird.'

It is also often proper to refer to your best friend as "a total or stupid bastard," often said loudly with raucous affection. By contrast, an enemy is "a bit of a bastard" and your worst enemy is just plain…"a bastard," said quietly yet firmly through clenched teeth!

Like our Celtic (Scot/Irish) and Cockney cousins, the typical Aussie is the master of the ironic understatement and of 'rhyming slang.' On the hottest day in living record it would not be unusual to hear an Aussie say - while wiping rivers of sweat out of their eyes - "Why this cold-snap! I could go a 'Terry-dear!!" Translation : God it's hot!! I'd love a cold beer. (Rhyming slang - Terry dear = beer. Can substitute anything that rhymes with beer, eg 'cherry cheer.' It is also common to see it shortened even further to just 'a Terry'.)

Aussies are notoriously casual when it comes to dealing with authority and just can't understand rampant nationalism or patriotism. Don't get me wrong, we're extremely proud to be Ozzies, but just think it would be rude to rub everyone's noses in it!

Here's some more general hints about us mob:

* The shorter the nickname, the more we like you. (If any word can be shortened, it will!)
* It's considered far better to be "down on your luck" than "up yourself." […]
* The alpha male in any group is he who takes the barbecue tongs from the hands of the host and blithely begins turning the snags. (Sausages.)
* The bigger the hat, the smaller the station / farm. (Never, ever a 'ranch!')
* The phrase "a simple picnic" is not known. Or at least not acted upon. You should take everything. If you don't need to make three trips back to the car, you are not trying.
* On picnics, the Esky (ice-box/cold storage container) is always too small, creating a food versus grog (alcohol) battle that can only ever be resolved by leaving the salad at home.
* The phrase "we've got a great lifestyle" means everyone in the family loves a drink.
* A flash sports car driven by a middle-aged man does not incite envy - as in America - but hilarity.
* If there's any sort of free event or party within a hundred and fifty kilometres, you'd be a mug not to go. Got to conquer the tyranny of distance!
* Whether it's the opening of Parliament, or the launch of a new art gallery, there is no Australian event that cannot be improved by a sausage-sizzle and onion rings.
* There is no food that cannot be improved by the application of tomato sauce. (Aka. 'dead horse' in rhyming slang.) It's never, ever called 'ketsup' despite the extensive marketing campaigns and the relentless onslaught of globalisation.
* A thong is not a piece of scanty swimwear, as in the 'good ole US of A, but a fine example of footwear. A group of good-lookin' Aussie sheilas wearing black rubber thongs may not be as exciting as you had hoped!!
* 'Rooting' for a team is not what you think!! The only people Aussies 'root' for is their husbands/wives/girlfriends/very good friends etc. We 'barrack' for our teams!

And, finally, don't let the tourist books fool you. No one says "cobber," and no Aussie would ever 'throw another shrimp on the barbie'. (We only eat prawns.)

Willy T.  
BrizVegas. (Brisbane.) Australia. <http://www.roadogz.com/stories/downunder/beingaustralian.htm>