

PLANNING A TRIP DOWNUNDER? THEN IT'S TIME TO LEARN THE AUSTRALIAN LANGUAGE

By Stephanie Jackson

So you plan to head down under mate? Well the good thing about choosing Australia as your destination is that the locals speak your lingo. But there are some strange colloquialisms that you'll need to understand to prevent you from making a fool of yourself, or as the locals say, making a monumental stuff up.

How would you respond, for instance, if confronted by an Aussie bloke complaining that "me sheila went crook and went walkabout to Woop Woop with a Mexican"? If you'd offer sympathy to this poor guy whose wife had become irate and left for somewhere unknown with a person who had migrated to Queensland from south of that state's border, then you obviously have a reasonable grasp of the Australian language. But if you thought that the word 'crook' referred only to bad guys; that Mexicans are only people from the American continent; and that 'sheila' is merely a woman's name, then you've got a lot to learn.

You'll probably start your vacation in 'the big smoke' – in a city, but if you want to see the best that Australia has to offer, your journey may take you to 'the never never', and to places that are 'back o' Bourke' or 'beyond the black stump'. These legendary areas are the 'outback', the vast, arid interior of the continent where sheep and cattle roam on farms known as 'stations'; where fields are 'paddocks'; where property owners are 'cow cockies' or 'graziers'; and where 'jillaroos' and 'jackaroos' do the work of farm labourers – and much more.

Out there, in the back of beyond, you'll encounter 'road trains' - gargantuan vehicles comprising a prime mover with three or more trailers in tow - roaring along dusty roads. And you'll see stockmen with their cattle out on 'the long paddock' - an immense network of unfenced stock routes where drovers and their herds wander for months, even years, in search of grass.

When rain clouds hint that relief from a dry spell is imminent, you'll hear Aussies mutter an emotive plea to their imaginary god 'Send her down Hughie'. And if old Hughie responds with a deluge, it might 'put the damper' on your holiday plans.

I don't wish you ill, but you might 'get the wog' or 'get crook' – suffer from a brief illness that sees you rushing to the 'dunny', - the toilet; or 'get bushed' – become temporarily lost in the outback, but whatever happens, don't 'spit chips', 'spit the dummy', 'go crook', 'get narked', or become irate. You'll find, in a moment of adversity, that someone will be there to help you, or to sound a positive note with those comforting words, 'She'll be right mate', 'She'll be Jake', or 'She's apples'.

In the multicultural society down under, call anyone a wog, a dago, or a chink and you're asking for whole lot of trouble. But an Aussie who's come from 'the old dart', from Mother England, won't bat an eyelid at being called a 'pommy', or even a 'pommy bastard', and Queenslanders never take exception to being called 'banana benders', for they're proud of their state that is famed for its tropical fruit.

Aussies are generally a pretty tolerant lot, but most have little time for 'bludgers' who are reluctant to work, nor for those who 'dob' in their mates to the boss for the most trivial of indiscretions. 'Dingbats', 'drongos', 'dills', and 'galahs' – all of whom have 'a few sheep missing in the top paddock' are quickly shown the door too.

Don't be offended, however, if someone suggests that you're 'as mad as a fruit bat', or 'a real dag', for it's a 'true blue' genuine Australian way of letting you know

that you're pleasantly eccentric. But if you hear murmurs that you're a little 'daggy', then pay attention, for in someone's eyes you're unacceptably untidy, scruffy, or even dirty.

You'll discover that there's plenty to do in the great outdoors, but if you're less than enthusiastic about bungee jumping or some other death-defying activity, you can expect to be called 'chicken'. But that's OK. It's just a friendly way of saying that you're a 'sook' who suffers from a tinge of cowardice, and certainly not an insult that should trigger 'a blue' - an argument - with anyone.

Aussies like nothing better than to spend a day at the beach, and if you've brought along your 'togs', 'bathers', or 'cossie', you can 'get your clobber off', and join the locals for a swim. You might prefer to hire a 'tinny' - a small boat - and head out fishing, but if you cast a line in the wrong place at the wrong time, locals will gloat that you'll have 'Buckley's' of catching anything. If you reel in a whopper, however, they'll salute your efforts with a cheery and sincere 'Good on ya, mate!'

If you're eager to go hunting for treasure, and keen to try your hand at 'fossicking' for gemstones, you could be in for some 'hard yakka'. That's hard work in plain English, but if your efforts bring rewards, don't shout 'You beaut!', or 'Bewdy!' when you discover a glint of gold or opal. And don't 'skite' or brag too loudly about what you've found.

Australia is a country where you can indulge in a culinary adventure too, for there's a great variety of food, or 'tucker', on offer. There's nothing strange or unfamiliar about 'chook' - it's merely chicken. But you'll be in for some pleasant surprises when you bite into 'bush tucker' that had its origins in an aboriginal diet, and that ranges from kangaroo and emu meat, to witchetty grubs (wood moth larvae that are eaten raw), and native fruits such as quandongs and bunya nuts. And if the taste of seafood is what you're looking for, sink your teeth into some 'flake' (shark), 'muddies' (mud crabs,) 'Moreton Bay bugs' (marine crustaceans), or 'yabbies' (freshwater crayfish) and you'll beg for more.

In every region of the country, you'll meet people who will give you a 'dinkum' Aussie welcome with a friendly 'G'day mate', even if they've never set eyes on you before. When you finally leave, you'll hear someone say 'Hooroo', 'See ya', or 'Hooray'. And if you realize they are simply saying goodbye without inferring that they're pleased to see the back of you, you're well on the way to understanding the curious Aussie lingo.

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