

## Episode 93: Australia

### Summary

Nick and his father Geoff talk about their home country of Australia. In particular, they talk about identity and development in Australia, the country's popular sports, and some special places in Australia that Geoff has visited.

### Transcript

Nick: Today I have a very special guest, who is my father Geoff. Dad, welcome!

Geoff: Thank you very much. I'm very honoured to be here.

Nick: And so after all these episodes, it's finally time that we actually talked about our home country, which is Australia. So you were born and bred<sup>1</sup> there, you've lived there all your life. How would you describe it to someone who didn't know anything about it?

Geoff: Large, usually sunny, laid-back<sup>2</sup>, friendly, and very diverse in its, uhh, in its landscape and culture, now, to a degree.

Nick: I think it's a country that fascinates a lot of people. I remember when I first went overseas in 2001, everybody was very curious. They would say, 'What's it like?' And everybody thought it was a very exotic country. That actually kind of annoyed me at the time because I thought we were coming into a real modern age in the country and, umm, we just had hosted the Sydney Olympics and I thought, you know, 'This is a first world, modern country,' and the, kind of, 1980s Crocodile Dundee aspect of Australia, I thought we should leave that behind and kind of move forward. Umm, how do you see that?

Geoff: I'm not sure I would describe it as exotic. Umm, we have moved forward, there's no question about that. The, umm, Crocodile Dundee, uhh, kangaroos hopping down the main street of Sydney image certainly was alive and well<sup>3</sup> for many, many years. And unfortunately we had an episode only a few months ago where there was actually a kangaroo hopping across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

Nick: Is that right?

---

<sup>1</sup> born and bred (phrase): born and grew up

<sup>2</sup> laid-back: relaxed, unhurried

<sup>3</sup> alive and well: healthy, flourishing

Geoff: That is right. And I'm not sure where it came from, somebody's backyard or a zoo. And I think that gained a bit of worldwide coverage and probably set us back about 20 years.

Nick: Yeah, maybe it did. But obviously in your lifetime you must have seen huge changes in Australia from when you were growing up.

Geoff: Absolutely huge, and the same for people elsewhere in the world. But in my early days as a sub-teenager, I guess, umm, it was very basic. We had no television until 1956, umm, all activities were just playing. Playing outdoors, umm, there was no feeling of any threat from bad people, if you like. Umm, and it was time to come indoors when the street lights came on. And Mum wasn't out looking for you. She knew you were safe. And it was very, very different then. So we've come through huge, huge changes from television to the electronic world until we're now up there with the rest of them, I think.

Nick: Yeah, I think the other thing is that probably when you were younger, Australia still very much looked to England as the, kind of, mother country. So you grew up using English currency until 1966 or thereabouts?

Geoff: 1966.

Nick: And singing God Save the Queen as the national anthem.

Geoff: Absolutely.

Nick: Until, I think, 1984 or something crazy like that.

Geoff: It was ... yes, yes. So that ... not colonialism, I'm not sure if that's the correct word.

Nick: Post-colonialism.

Geoff: Post-colonialism, umm, carried on for quite a long time, and there are still many people in Australia trying to change that. Uhh, the Republican movement is quite strong, and many people feel that we should have our own head of state, and, umh, pay allegiance<sup>4</sup> to ourselves, really, instead of someone else. But there are many, many people who still quite like the old ties.

Nick: Yeah, I think between your generation and my generation, that really switched, from England being the, kind of, country to look at, the larger country to look at - larger in stature, not in actual size - umh, to the United States. And I think probably the key event that sparked that was the Vietnam War, but that's another story. Because when I was little - when I was very little - I thought Australia was one half of the world and America was the other half of the world.

---

<sup>4</sup> allegiance: loyalty to someone, typically of a citizen to the government or sovereign

Geoff: Umm, yeah, American certainly has taken a little bit away from the allegiance or the recognition of England as our source of culture and all those sort of things. I think television has made a big difference there as well. And the younger people certainly have embraced the American television culture, the American shows, and that then affects, umm, their behaviour or their ... who they follow. They might all of a sudden be following the basketball whereas they wouldn't have been doing that before. Umm, cricket may have taken a little bit of a back seat because of that, for the younger people. But, uhh, yeah, it's changed immensely.

Nick: Yeah, speaking of which, it's a big sporting nation, Australia. It's a big part of who Australians are. Umm, cricket is almost kind of the national sport in a way because our football codes are divided between regions in Australia. So I think most people actually prefer the football that they follow to cricket, but everybody kind of likes cricket. Whereas where we're from in Sydney, in the state of New South Wales, the winter sport that most people follow is rugby league. In Melbourne and other parts of the country, it's Australian rules football. Umm, but that's a big part of the Australian identity, I think.

Geoff: It's very parochial<sup>5</sup>, the following of the football codes. And a lot of friendly banter<sup>6</sup>, umm, between the various states, uhh, regarding that. Umm, football, or soccer as we know it, but football as it's known in this part of the world (Europe) doesn't have a particular base. It's spread all the way around the country, so there's a little bit of, umm, uniformity there but, yes, the football code is definitely a dividing one. And there's an annual battle in the rugby league, the one you mentioned, between New South Wales and Queensland and that is ... that's war.

Nick: It is war, and it's quite funny because it's between two different states. Umm, when you're growing up you learn to just hate the other state like crazy, you know, because of that, but then when you get a bit older you kind of realise that everybody's Australian and it doesn't really matter that much. But it's hugely popular though.

Geoff: It's hugely popular, and also the, umm, the teams are chosen from where the players are born. So what you actually can have, very frequently, is players who normally play week-by-week together, and then all of a sudden in this annual three-match series, they're playing against each other and you would think that they didn't like that person at all. It's so intense.

Nick: Right, and so State of Origin is what this is called. And so the tagline<sup>7</sup> for many years, I don't know if they still do it, was, 'State against state. Mate against mate.'

---

<sup>5</sup> parochial: regional, provincial

<sup>6</sup> banter: good-natured teasing or joking

<sup>7</sup> tagline: marketing phrase or slogan

Geoff: I think they still use that.

Nick: I'm sure they do. So when I was younger we didn't travel a huge amount around Australia because we tended to do trips where we could drive and go camping and things like that, because we were a family of five. But later, once we all grew up, you and Mum have been able to travel quite a bit around different parts of Australia. So which of those places really stood out for you?

Geoff: Uhh, a couple in particular. The Far North Queensland area of Cairns, uhh, and, in particular, a little village I'll call it, north of that called Port Douglas. Very, very nice, and they are gateways<sup>8</sup> to the Great Barrier Reef, and we've been privileged to go out there and snorkel, umm, on the reef a few times. The reef is running into a bit of, uhh, trouble from the environment at the moment and there are many calls for a lot of money to be spent to try and solve this problem. But anyway, that certainly is a feature. The other one that stands out to me is there's a small island, I think it's about the fourth largest island off Australia, called Kangaroo Island, off South Australia, down in the, uhh, down in the south. And that is so diverse. It has so many different things in a small area. Uhh, lots of wildlife, umm, seals, bees, pure bred bees which have been there for many, many years, originally from Italy. And they've never been contaminated by other bees. It's just a hugely interesting, umm, foodie-type place. Umm, and that's the other one that stands out. And the red centre, of course. Uhh, Ayers Rock, or Uluru as we should call it, uhh, it's just fascinating, and particularly coming from a coastal area with lots of gum trees and ocean, and then all of a sudden to go out there and just see this rich, red soil, uhh, and deep blue sky and this magnificent rock, is something special.

Nick: Yep. So it's pretty much the symbol of Australia, I guess. Quite embarrassingly, I've never seen it, umm, in person. But as you said, we used to call it Ayers Rock when I was a kid, and certainly when you were a kid.

Geoff: Yes.

Nick: Uluru is the Aboriginal name, and it's a huge part of Aboriginal culture and history. And they're doing a lot more now to protect it, right? Because you used to be able to climb it and now you can't.

Geoff: It was almost a rite<sup>9</sup>, or a task, if you like, when you went out there to climb Ayers Rock in days gone by<sup>10</sup>. For the last, maybe, 20 years, they have discouraged this, umm, and now I believe it's virtually banned. And that's a good thing. Umm, it is an amazing, amazing site. It is very, very special for the Aboriginal community. And we should respect their rights that they don't want us clambering

---

<sup>8</sup> gateways: bases from where other places can be entered

<sup>9</sup> rite: something important that 'must' be done at a certain time or in a certain place

<sup>10</sup> in days gone by (phrase): previously, in the past

all over the top of it. Uhh, and it can be dangerous as well. It's quite, uhh ... I think people have died trying to climb it. And it's a special place.

Nick: Yeah, I couldn't agree more. Well, thank you very much for your insight on Australia.

Geoff: Pleasure.

## Comprehension Questions

1. Which recent event did Geoff talk about that reinforced the image that many other countries have of Australia?
2. Why does Nick say that cricket is the national sport of Australia?
3. What recent change regarding visiting Uluru did Nick and Geoff discuss?

## Exercises

*Use the words and expressions in the footnotes of the transcript to fill in the gaps.*

1. They are best friends but they support different football teams. So when the teams play against each other, there's a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ between the friends.
2. Children in America say the pledge of \_\_\_\_\_ to the United States every day at school.
3. Sydney and Melbourne are the \_\_\_\_\_ to Australia. You can fly to either city from many international cities, and use it as a base to explore the country.
4. Arnold Schwarzenegger is famous for starring in American movies and for being the governor of California, but he was \_\_\_\_\_ in Austria.
5. Stamp collecting may not be as popular as it used to be, but if you go to a large convention, you can see that the hobby is still \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_, children spent a lot of time playing outdoors. But these days, they have so many indoor entertainment options that they tend to prefer.
7. In summer in England, especially at the Wimbledon tennis tournament, eating strawberries and cream is a \_\_\_\_\_. People do it every year.
8. Nike's \_\_\_\_\_ 'Just Do It' is so effective that they haven't changed it for decades.
9. The home crowd at the football match was very \_\_\_\_\_, and they hurled a lot of abuse at the opposition team from out of town.
10. After a busy few months at work, she took a holiday to a very \_\_\_\_\_ town on the beach where she could relax for a week.

## Discussion Questions

Discuss these questions with a partner or in the [English in 10 Minutes Listeners group on Facebook](#):

1. Have you been to Australia? If so, did you like it? If not, would you like to go? Why or why not?
2. Geoff talked about American television being popular among young people in Australia. Is that also true in your country? If so, what do you think about it?
3. Geoff mentioned three places in particular in Australia that stand out for him: the Great Barrier Reef, Kangaroo Island and Uluru. Which of these would you like to visit the most? Why?

## Answers

### Comprehension Questions

1. A kangaroo (or wallaby) hopped across the Sydney Harbour Bridge.
2. Because the various football codes are only popular in certain parts of the country, whereas cricket is popular throughout the whole country.
3. That visitors used to climb the rock and now it is discouraged or forbidden.

### Exercises

1. banter
2. allegiance
3. gateways
4. born and bred
5. alive and well
6. in days gone by
7. rite
8. tagline
9. parochial
10. laid-back