



## **How Australia has changed since last Australia Day**

Source: Sunday Mail  
Date: 26 January 2009

**FROM experts to average folk, the verdict is the same: Australia is a changed land. What a difference a year makes.**

Once again tomorrow, Australians everywhere will be gathered around the barbecue with family and friends enjoying a break from work.

However this year is different.

Something has changed.

This year, social commentators say, the global recession has sparked a dramatic and sudden shift in our cultural values since last Australia Day.

National pride is back in fashion.

During the past 15 years, the Great Aussie Battler retreated to the hills, replaced by a new tribe – the Aspirational Aussie, according to leading social demographer Bernard Salt.

But now, he says, the Battler is back.

Last January, we were still largely a nation of "Kath and Kims", he says.

Obsessed with our plasma televisions, our home gyms, our McMansions and our aspirational lifestyles.

"Driving a flashy car or going to a celebrity restaurant and spending a ludicrous amount for a meal was seen as a symbol of your success," Mr Salt said.

"Now it's just seen as crass and insensitive.

"There's a new morality.

"It's now immoral to have outrageously high salaries.

"The overseas holiday has become the domestic holiday.

"The trophy restaurant meal is now a dinner party at home with friends."

The change is due in part because, in the current global economy, regular Australians have less money to splash around on non-essential items.

However Mr Salt argues the cultural shift goes deeper than merely dollars and cents.

He predicts it is a change that will be a dominant part of the Australian character for the next five years.



"What's important to Australians now is sustainability, ethical behaviour, family values," he said.

"This cultural shift has been very powerful, very quick and all-pervading."

Australians are going back to core values, agrees social analyst David Chalke.

"We're turning away from a material economy and back towards a more humane society," he said.

"We're thinking more about the fundamental basics of life like caring and helping.

"All those things your nanna told you about and you forgot.

"This Australia Day we'll see a willingness for people to think more about their country, and less about themselves."

So, what does it mean to be Australian?

Chalke and Salt say the rebirth of national pride is not about embracing blue singlets, cork hats and terry towelling hats, but having a new appreciation and understanding of the

societal values and work ethic that the country was built on.

Navy veteran Joe Galea says the spirit of Australia can be summed up with one word: **mateship**.

"I think it has always been about our mates, even before Gallipoli," he said.

"I think the Australian sense of mateship was forged in the bush, in the days when we had to rely on each other and battle the land."

Now retired in a caravan beside the beach at Caloundra on the Sunshine Coast, Mr Galea, 67, was a crew member of Royal Australian Navy aircraft carrier **HMAS Melbourne**

([http://www.navy.gov.au/HMAS\\_Melbourne\\_%28II%29](http://www.navy.gov.au/HMAS_Melbourne_%28II%29)) on the fateful night of February 10, 1964.

The aircraft carrier entered Australian history books when it was involved in a collision with the Daring class destroyer HMAS *Voyager*, which unexpectedly altered course into the path

of Melbourne, at a cost of 82 lives.

Mr Galea, who arrived from Malta as a nine-year-old boy, joined the Royal Australian Navy in 1958, and served on the Melbourne for almost a decade, including tours of duty to

Malaya and Vietnam.

He said attitudes to people who served their country had changed in recent years and the defence forces were being shown more respect.

"A lot of people get behind our troops now," he said.

"They may not agree with what is happening but they still support the troops."



Mr Galea said it seemed values were changing and young people didn't have much respect for possessions – their own or anyone else's – any longer, but "maybe people thought that about us as we were growing up too".

Sunshine Coast 21-year-old Corinna Smith is a medical student, surf lifesaver and campaigner against skin cancer who describes Australia as "one big family".

"Mateship is very much alive everywhere in Australia – whether it be at the beach, in the city or rurally," she said.

"Being accepting and being there when it matters the most is what's important."

The former Mountain Creek State High School student said: "What's important to Australians is equality, family and keeping traditions alive – like drinking Fouxex, going to the beach, wearing pluggers, Stubbies and singlets – as well as accepting and harvesting new traditions.

"That's what makes Australia great."

In her view, Australia is a "fair-go" country, accepting other cultures and "learning from each other to make ourselves better people".

Brisbane Greek migrant Rebekka Tapinos is among the many people to have come to Australia chasing that "fair go", and said there was never any question of "going back".

The 42-year-old East Brisbane mother was forced from her native homeland of Cyprus as a young girl by the mid-1970s Turkish invasion.

On September 11, 1983, days before her 17th birthday, Mrs Tapinos migrated to Australia as a proxy bride to a fellow Cypriot refugee – who had relocated with his family here.

It was an era in which arranged marriages like theirs were still common for many foreigners who wanted to call Australia home.

"Back when I did my citizenship, it was a very different Australia," says Mrs Tapinos, an administrative worker at the Greek Welfare Centre.

"We had to take an oath to the Queen and sing the British national anthem."

Twenty-five years, three children, and one divorce later, Mrs Tapinos says she could never leave Brisbane.

"Even though my parents and siblings are all still over in Cyprus, I would never think of going back. I've spent more years here in Australia and have grown to love the Australian way of life," she said.

More importantly for Mrs Tapinos, the country provided a safe haven to bring up her children, Christiana, 23, Maria, 22, and Elena, 19.



"The insecurity of being a refugee at the age of seven had a big impact on me. Being able to raise my three daughters in a place where I felt they were safe has meant a lot," Mrs Tapinos said.

"In the 25 years that I've lived in Brisbane, I've found that people have become far more accepting of those of us from ethnic backgrounds.

"These days, people are fascinated about foreigners, in a good way, wanting to know where we come from. Australians travel a lot more and are exposed to different cultures outside their own."

As a former refugee, she admits having mixed feelings about Australia Day.

"I have lived through having my homeland invaded and so I do feel sad for native Australians," she said.

"It shouldn't just be seen as a day off work to have a barbecue and celebrate the 'finding of Australia'.

"These people were already here. Australia Day should be promoted as a multicultural day where people of all backgrounds come together."

Dr Samarra Toby, 27, an inspirational indigenous Australian working for the Mater Hospital in Brisbane, says the Aussie work ethic is what defines the country.

"Australians are really hard-working people – they put in the hard yakka and don't complain at the end of the day," she said.

"It's great to be part of the Australian community where everyone contributes.

"Not only that, but from a stranger on the street to your best friend, someone is always willing to help out – Australia is such a friendly country."

The young doctor said Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's formal apology last year left a strong mark on her.

"The apology to the Stolen Generations really did a lot for me personally and it did a lot for the indigenous community in terms of healing and moving forward."

She said Democrat Barack Obama becoming American president also provided hope to indigenous Australians, showing them anything was achievable.

"In this country we can have dreams and we have the opportunity to fulfil them through education – the opportunities are there for the taking," she said.

"For me, it was to become a doctor and through hard work and with the support of Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians I was able to fulfil my dream.

"Australia is a place that makes dreams come true."



This Australia Day, Dr Toby said it was important to celebrate the many Australian people doing great things in a vast array of fields.

"Whether it be sportsmen and women, scientists, doctors or teachers – Australia has so many people excelling worldwide," she said.

"I am absolutely proud to be Australian. I don't think I would want to live anywhere else in the world."

Zarraffa's Coffee founder and director Kenton Campbell, who moved here from California in 1995, says Australians are not only hard-working: they're also honest.

"Australians mean what they say," he said.

Mr Campbell started Zarraffa's Coffee as a wholesaler and in 1997 launched it as a retailer.

Since then he has not looked back and there are now 34 stores in Queensland and New South Wales.

"One thing I have noticed coming from the States is that people have the opportunity to give anything a go," he said.

"We're really living in the land of possibilities and there are a lot of people that don't recognise that."

He said the move to Australia had enabled him to "relax and see the world in a different light".

"I love that as Australians we give ourselves a chance to enjoy life – to have some drinks and sit back and relax – without taking ourselves too seriously," he said.

Australians were more "worldly" – willing to travel and get out there and have an adventure, and he appreciates the sense of humour and the way Australians show their patriotism

through sport.

"It's really unique," he said.

"The Australian spirit is 'never say die' and don't quit and I think that's really important for my children to see.

"Australians endure things together and we will come out together.

"Australia is really good at that."

