



WATER SAFETY

Visitors to Australia can take advantage of our many beaches and waterways but should remember to follow basic water safety at all times.

As the world's largest island, Australia is fringed with almost 10,700 superb beaches just waiting to be enjoyed. Along with magnificent lakes and river systems and a warm climate, this makes water-based activities extremely popular right around the country. To follow are some handy guidelines and tips on water safety both at the beach and when swimming in our inland waters.



AT THE BEACH

Stretched out or tucked into bays along almost 50,000 kms of the most diverse, least crowded and unspoilt coastline in the world are more beaches than you'll find in any other nation. To stay safe at the beach:

- Swim at patrolled beaches: Only swim at a beach patrolled by Australia's highly-trained surf lifesavers and lifeguards. Popular beaches are usually patrolled by volunteer surf lifesavers from October to April, while professional lifeguards may patrol the most popular beaches year-round.
- Check surf conditions: Be aware that surf conditions can change quickly. Talk to a lifesaver or lifeguard before entering the water.
- Swim between the red and yellow flags at the beach: These areas are the safest sections of the beach because this marks the safest place to swim. If swimming outside these areas, there is a risk that you will not be noticed if you get into trouble.
- Be aware of what other flags means: In addition to the red and yellow flags, other flags may be used at certain times: a yellow flag indicates potentially dangerous conditions; a red flag represents danger and indicates that the beach is closed for swimming; a red and white chequered flag indicates that a shark has been sighted in the water; and a blue flag indicates that surfers may use the area for board riding.
- Sun protection is essential on Australia beaches: Extended time in the strong Australia sun can cause sunburn as well as sun stroke and dehydration. For this reason, it is important to protect yourself with sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat.
- If you are in trouble in the water, raise your arm for help: As many Australian beaches can become crowded in summer, it is important to know that the symbol to indicate to lifesavers that you are in trouble and need help is to raise your arm. This assists lifesavers to differentiate between those who need help and come to your aid more quickly.
- Never swim alone: Don't swim alone or under the influence of alcohol or drugs, nor swim in darkness or run, jump or dive into shallow water.



RIPS

Many surf beaches in Australia have rips – powerful currents of water that can be dangerous, sometimes dragging swimmers out into deep water very quickly. Identifying rips can be difficult but in general, look for signs of a narrow channel of water moving out to sea more quickly than the water on either side of that channel. If you find yourself caught in a rip:

- Do not panic and do not try to swim against the current.
- Signal for help by raising your arm, then float on your back to conserve energy while you wait for the lifesaver or lifeguard to help you.
- Stronger swimmers can try to swim across the current parallel to the beach for around 30 metres, then use the waves to swim back to the beach.
- Remember to stay calm and conserve energy – a rip will only take you beyond where the waves are breaking, so there is no need to panic.

LARGE SURF

Large surf conditions can be extremely dangerous. When there is very large surf it is vital that anyone heading to the coast remembers to swim only in patrolled areas. If conditions are dangerous enough, beaches will be closed, and swimmers and board riders will be advised to stay out of the water and listen to the advice of the surf lifesavers and lifeguards. If the beaches are closed, a red flag will fly and lifesavers will remain on the beach to encourage people to stay out of the water.

INLAND WATERS

Australia's waterways are a paradise of rivers, inlets, estuaries, fresh and saltwater lakes containing abundant fish and wildlife. They can all be great for swimming, but swimmers need to exercise caution at all times. Read and obey warning signs at waterways and never swim alone, under the influence of alcohol or drugs, in darkness or when the water is unknown, nor run, jump or dive into shallow water.

USEFUL LINKS

Surf Life Saving Australia

Beachsafe

Royal Life Saving Society Australia

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