



NaaKeenatt welcome  
 Guruul-  
 Yolngu wala wangalili! welcome  
 Ngai wangandi marni nabuc  
 Kurna yertaanna  
 Werel Pukulpa pitjama Ananguku ngurakutu Yamitji Bitja Rali marrtija Yolngu  
 Nangga welcome  
 Pukulpa pitjama Ananguku ngurakutu  
 Yamitji Bitja Rali marr



# Relationship Responsibility Respect

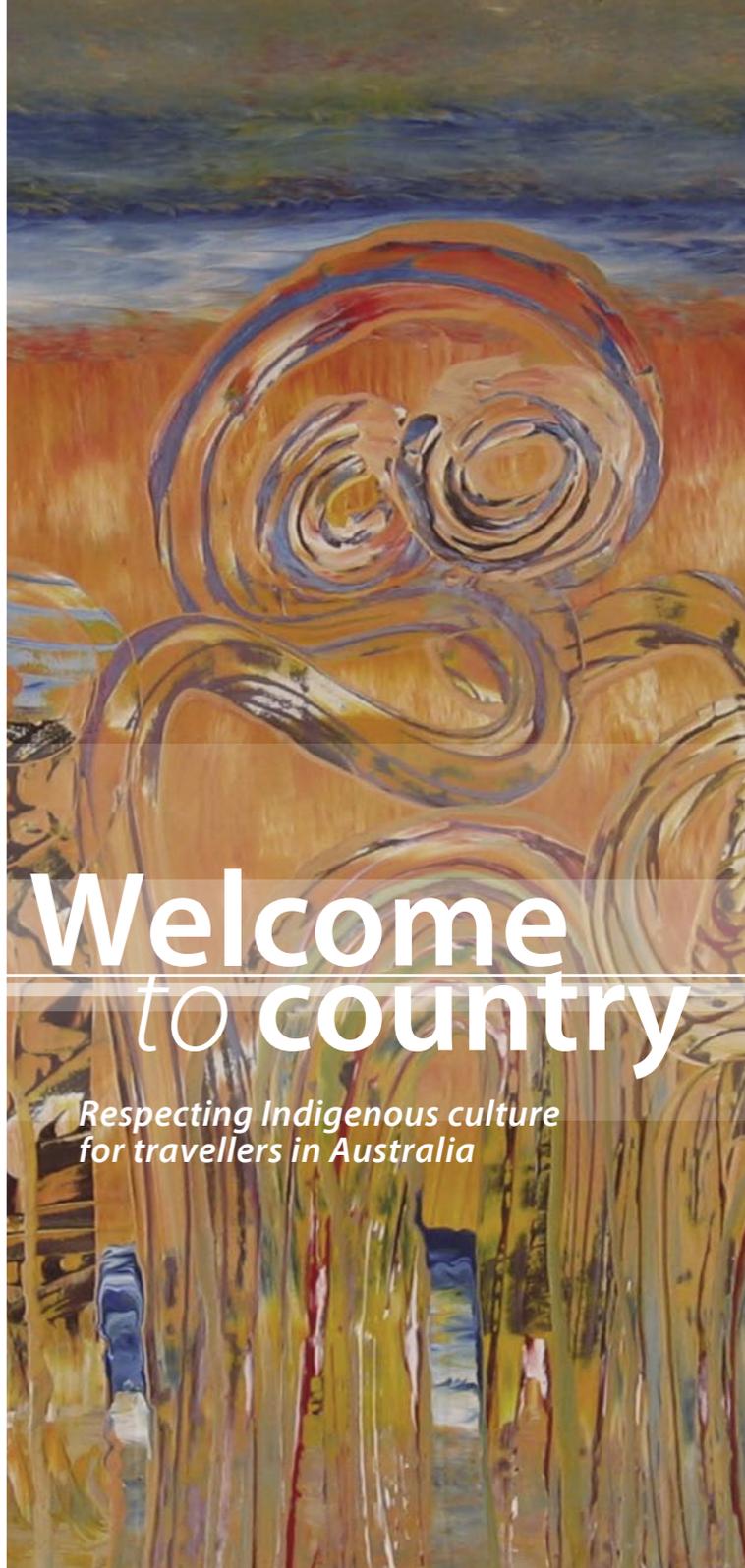
Remember the 3 'R's'  
**Relationship** – Recognise Indigenous people's relationship and connection to the land.  
**Responsibility** – Acknowledge the ongoing responsibility Indigenous people have to their country, and recognise your own responsibility to travel thoughtfully.  
**Respect** – Respect Aboriginal beliefs associated with country and culture. As a visitor, respect the wishes of your hosts and any restrictions that you have been asked to observe.



**Australian Government**  
**Department of the Environment and Heritage**

Artist : Fiona Omeeny © ' Family' and 'Sand Beach People', courtesy Lockhart River Art Centre.  
 Quotes sourced from:  
 1. Bird Rose, D. (1996) *Nourishing Terrains, Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, p7.  
 2. Neidjie, B. (2002) *Gagadju Man*, JB Books Pty Ltd: Marleston, p32.  
 3. Courtesy of Nyaparu Tarran, Broome, 2004.

Produced by Aboriginal Tourism Australia with funding from the Australian Government  
 Department of the Environment and Heritage ([www.deh.gov.au](http://www.deh.gov.au))  
 Specially published by Lonely Planet Business Solutions for Aboriginal Tourism Australia (ATA) 2004



# Welcome to country

*Respecting Indigenous culture  
 for travellers in Australia*



## Australia: a country of many ‘countries’

Australia has many different Indigenous language groups and cultures. Australian Indigenous peoples include Torres Strait Islanders who are culturally distinct from Aboriginal Australians. Each group has a vibrant culture of which they are immensely proud. The diversity of languages, cultural beliefs and customs add to the complexity and richness of Indigenous cultures.

Wherever you visit in Australia, you travel across and stay in country significant to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. From the remotest location in Tasmania or Australia’s north to our cosmopolitan cities, you are visiting the traditional lands of Indigenous Australians.

Groups often speak of the lands and waters they have traditional affiliation and responsibility for as ‘country’.

Throughout Australia, the responsibility to look after or ‘care for country’ is held by clan and family groups as well as individuals. Senior people in the community, who are responsible for their traditional land and waters, are often referred to as ‘traditional owners’.

**“People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country and long for country....country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy...Because of this richness, country is home, and peace; nourishment for body, mind and spirit; heart’s ease.”**

*Deborah Bird Rose, Nourishing Terrains<sup>1</sup>*

## Spiritual connections

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a unique relationship to the land and waters of their country. This relationship embraces a certain responsibility to look after the spiritual and environmental wellbeing of country. Responsibilities include acknowledging and paying respect to the spirit ancestors who created the land and introduced customs and languages. Responsibilities to care for country are defined through traditional law.

Although creation beliefs and customary practices vary greatly across Australia, they are all based on the journeys of ancestral beings and events which took place during the creation period. This is often referred to as the ‘Dreaming’ or ‘Dreamtime’.

**“...Our story is in the land. It is written in those sacred places...”**

*Bill Neidjie, Gagadju Man<sup>2</sup>*



## Welcoming visitors to country

Welcoming people to country is a traditional practice of special significance. When an Indigenous person visits places in their country they may talk to the spirit ancestors of that place to identify who they are, and who is accompanying them. In some areas welcoming visitors may take other forms – it could be a formal or informal welcome address or another type of ceremony. Such ceremonies typically involve the use of fire, smoke or water.

Local groups each have their own customs and protocols about welcoming visitors to their land.

Traditional owners and communities take the role and responsibility of welcoming visitors to their country very seriously. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are generally very happy to welcome travellers to their traditional land. They do this with great pride, as gaining recognition and respect for country and their role as custodians is very important.

## Being welcomed to country

At various places throughout Australia there are times when a welcome may be extended to visitors by traditional owners. The type of welcome offered will vary depending on the individual or group involved. You may be welcomed in the form of a sign or a brochure.

If you are invited onto Aboriginal land or into an Aboriginal community, a personal welcome may be extended by traditional owners.

Acknowledgement of traditional lands or a welcome from a representative of the local Indigenous group might also be included at the start of a major event or conference.

As a visitor, being welcomed is your chance to acknowledge and reflect on the particular community on whose ancestral lands you stand.

## Respecting your hosts and the country you visit

Travelling in a responsible way includes respecting your hosts and their country. In the same way we act with courtesy when visiting someone’s home, we should respect the land and the people who have important connections to it.

You may not always be formally welcomed to country, and in some



areas it may not be clear whose traditional lands you are visiting or travelling through. Checking with local tourism agencies, local governments, land and community councils, parks and wildlife agencies or local Aboriginal organisations may provide you with this information. This simple act of inquiring about whose traditional lands you are visiting, is itself, a mark of respect.

There may also be opportunities for you to personally acknowledge the privilege of visiting a group’s country or special places.

**“Country got ears and country knows its people”**

*Nyaparau Tarran 2004*

## Being a responsible traveller

The choices you make when travelling can and do make a difference. Respecting Indigenous culture and country is a matter of travelling thoughtfully. Use the following points as a guide.

### Respecting people’s privacy

- Many Aboriginal communities or lands require permits to enter – this helps ensure people’s privacy. You may need to organise permits with land or community councils well in advance.
- If you are visiting an Aboriginal community, wait until you are invited to approach homes or groups of people.
- Funerals and cultural ceremonies are times of special privacy – use extra sensitivity in communities at these times.

### Respecting restrictions

- There may be places that are closed to visitors because of their cultural significance – heed advice if you are asked not to enter an area.
- In some places it is culturally inappropriate to swim or fish in waterways, waterholes and/or sea country.
- Some places can only be visited by men or women – please respect these protocols where they apply to non-Indigenous people.
- When in doubt about where you can or cannot go, it is good practice to ‘ask first’.
- The possession or consumption of alcohol is restricted in some Indigenous communities – these restrictions also apply to visitors.



## Talking to Indigenous people

- If you are talking to an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, recognise that they may communicate differently to non-Indigenous people – English may be a second or third language.
- Access to specific cultural knowledge or stories may not be open to everyone – it is best to avoid direct questions about matters that could be sensitive, unless invited to do so.
- Dress etiquette applies when visiting some Indigenous communities – if in doubt avoid wearing short skirts, short shorts or other revealing clothes.

## Taking photographs and filming

- Always ask before filming or taking photos of a person, a group of people or cultural activities.
- Photographing and filming some places and objects is restricted for cultural reasons – please respect this important request from traditional owners.
- If you intend to use your photographs in a publication or for other commercial purposes, you will need to seek copyright permission from the people featured in the photo.

## Taking home a memento

- Locally produced Aboriginal art and craftworks make an excellent memory of your visit to a place – if possible choose items designed and made by Aboriginal people. Look and ask for items that have a label of cultural authenticity.
- Purchasing items from Aboriginal people through respected outlets helps to create economic support for people in communities where there may be limited opportunities for employment.
- Please do not remove rocks or other objects from Aboriginal land or waters without the permission of traditional owners. Disturbing cultural sites is also prohibited by Australian law.