Icons of the outback

Australia’s most far-off desert areas are known as the outback. The outback is home to isolated communities, cattle stations and locations that have given Australia some important icons. All of these icons have become symbolic of the outback because they represent a unique lifestyle.

The Red Centre

The Red Centre describes the red desert in the heart of Australia. In 1872, an Overland Telegraph Line station was built in the Red Centre. The town of Alice Springs grew from this station. The Red Centre is home to rich Indigenous cultures. About 440 kilometres away from Alice Springs is the world-famous, sacred, Indigenous site of Uluru.

The Red Centre gets its name from its soil, which is red because of its iron content.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) provides emergency medical help to isolated communities. Doctors and nurses travel in RFDS planes to treat patients or transfer them to a hospital. The RFDS cares for around 270,000 patients each year and is a true hero of the Australian outback.

The School of the Air

Since 1951, the School of the Air has helped to educate students across the outback by using radio and other communication technologies. These technologies connect students with teachers who live far away. The School of the Air is symbolic of the efforts Australians have made to adapt to Australia’s vast territory.

HELP AT HAND

The RFDS is a non-profit organisation that flies 24 hours a day. It covers 80 per cent of the Australian continent and attends to around 270,000 patients each year.

High-frequency radios and the Internet allow School of the Air students across the outback to learn together.

SYMBOL FACT

Uniquely Australian names for the outback that have become popular over time are ‘the back of Bourke’, ‘the never-never’ and ‘beyond the black stump’.
Icons of the beach

Australia has a massive coastline that is more than 47,000 kilometres long. It is no wonder that the beach is an icon of Australian life in coastal cities and towns. Surf, sand and sunshine represent the laidback Australian lifestyle.

Surf lifesavers

Surf lifesavers patrol Australia’s beaches. They are highly trained volunteers who help swimmers in trouble. They watch out for dangers in our rough seas, such as sharks and rips. Surf lifesavers keep beaches safe for the community. They are popular heroes and icons.

The uniform and equipment used by surf lifesavers make them easily recognisable on the beach.

SYMBOL FACT

Today, around 50,000 Australian children learn beach safety and lifesaving skills in Surf Life Saving Australia’s ‘nippers’ groups.

Thongs

Thongs are not an Australian invention, but they are our favourite summer footwear. Since the 1960s, thongs have become an icon of Australia’s hot climate and relaxed beach lifestyle. At the beach, thongs protect feet from the hot sand and sharp rocks. During summer, thongs are acceptable footwear almost everywhere in Australia.

Many symbols of Australian culture, such as thongs and surf lifesavers, were included in the closing ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, New South Wales.

SUN SAFETY

Zinc cream was invented in Australia in 1940. The thick cream is used to protect skin from the sun’s harmful rays. Zinc cream was originally white, but is now sold in bright colours.
Icons of the backyard

After World War II (1939–1945), many Australians dreamed of owning a house with a large backyard. The backyard became a symbol of Australian family life in suburbs and towns. Many items connected to the backyard have become iconic.

The Hills Rotary Hoist

The Hills Rotary Hoist is a type of rotating clothesline invented by Lance Hill in 1945. He improved the existing rotating clothesline model by adding a device that allowed the clothesline to be lowered and raised. This simple invention made housework easier and allowed more clothes to be hung and dried. Today, Hill’s backyard clothesline is an icon of Australian suburban life.

By the late 1960s, the Hills Rotary Hoist was a recognised feature in Australian backyards.

SYMBOL FACT
The Hills Rotary Hoist was a feature at the closing ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, New South Wales, which had a backyard theme.

The Victa lawnmower

Mervyn Richardson invented the Victa lawnmower in his backyard shed near Sydney, New South Wales, in 1952. It was more powerful and lighter than other lawnmowers. The old rotary lawnmowers needed two people to push them, but the Victa needed only one person. Today, the Victa is an icon of Australian gardening.

The petrol-powered Victa made lawnmowing a much easier and faster task.

OTHER ICONS OF THE BACKYARD

Some other icons of the traditional Australian backyard include: the shed, the lemon tree, the ‘chook’ (chicken) house, the dog kennel, the vegetable patch, the passionfruit or choko vine, the barbecue and the dunny (outhouse).