Sydney might not be the capital of Australia, but it is probably its best known city. It is the largest city in the country, the capital of the state of New South Wales and an important financial and cultural centre. Thanks to its unique location alongside a spectacular natural harbour on the hills surrounding Port Jackson, Sydney is often called the Harbour City.

The area of Sydney had long been inhabited by Aboriginal people before the British established their colony there in 1788. Sydney was used as a penal (prison) settlement from 1788 until 1850. Life in the prison was brutal. The prisoners, known as convicts, had to work hard and experienced cruel physical punishment for disobeying (not following) orders. After 1810 the city grew gradually freer. In the 1850s a new wave of people arrived in the city. Many of them were searching for gold in a region 150 kilometres from Sydney. They included the first Chinese immigrants, who opened small businesses in the city.

The city’s population continued to grow in the 20th century, attracting people from all over the world. After the Second World War many immigrants from Europe found their new home in Sydney. In the 1970s this trend changed, with more people coming from Asia. This international population gives Sydney a very cosmopolitan atmosphere.

In the seventies, many famous Australian bands such as Midnight Oil, INXS and AC/DC started their careers in the city. In more recent years, Sydney has become a popular place to make films. Some Hollywood blockbusters (successful films) that were shot there include The Matrix, Mission Impossible II and the Star Wars prequels.

For sports lovers, Sydney co-hosts “the Ashes” cricket tournament with Melbourne – a long-running competition between Australia and England. The Rolex Sydney Hobart Yacht Race is another important international event. Locally, Rugby League is extremely popular and Sydney has several rugby teams. For many people, the most famous sporting event was the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games.

Today, Sydney is a popular tourist destination. People come to see the landmarks and to enjoy the mild climate, relaxed atmosphere and truly cosmopolitan culture.

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