

[Hindus Moving Up, Down Under On Australia's 200th Birthday](#)

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Cute and cuddly koala bears readily symbolize Australia's mellow spirit. Koalas are slow-moving and born comedians. Australians kinda swagger and say funny things like, "Hey mate, toss another shrimp on the barbie [barbecue]."

Hindus living and prospering in Australia for the past 150 years would say, with the same jaunty, Aussie accent, "Hey walla, toss another stuffed dosai on the barbie"-shrimp not being in their usual diet.

Australian citizens - that is the 15.5 million descendants from the British colonials that first sailed to Australia in 1788 to establish a penal colony, then sheep ranching, cane-raising, gold mining, industrialization; and all the people that came with such progress (including Hindus from India) - are celebrating their 200th birthday this year. If America is a melting pot, Australia is definitely a barbecue, where all of the food stuffs lie distinctly unblended, roasting on the grill. The Australian government began undoing the "white Australia" policy in the 1960's. But the original Australians-the 200,000 Aborigines-and the Asians who bled and sweated into the Australian dust as indentured laborers and have upscaled into business and professional occupations are still not happily intermixing with the whites of the old generation. Hope is that the young, who don't know of blatant discrimination, will befriend Australia's other citizens. Asians now account for 20% of the population and one out of three new arrivals is from southern Asia, which Australia sits under like a giant pillow. It is more an Eastern country than Western.

If the Aborigines were throwing a landfall party, they would be celebrating their forty-thousandth year. They came from Asia too, most likely Indonesia, crossing the Banda Sea in rafts to New Guinea then walking a land bridge into the outback of Australia. Some locales in the outback have been inhabited for 23,000 years. Western reason likes to classify these intuitive people as primitive. In terms of an abiding, spiritual rapport with their eerily tranquil land, they are colossally

sophisticated. They feel the grow or life-force of the Earth like city-dwellers feel the rumble of subways. It is the West that is ecologically primitive.

Hindus first came to Australia in 1830, a handful of weathered farmers from Bengal who worked under indentured contracts. Sea-voyaging Hindus may have actually come to this dry continent many centuries earlier, for they had hop-scotched through the Indonesian Islands establishing several empires.

By 1900, as many as 1,000 Hindus had made Australia probably a cursed home, for they were separated from their families. A decade later the separation rule was relaxed, and Australian-born Hindus entered the world.

As Australia prospered, Hindus moved into private business, merchandising and professional services. By the 1970's, the Hindu population had jumped to near 20,000 and the different ethnic affiliations were coalescing into organizations. Spread through New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and South and West Australia, at least five Hindu temples have sprouted, indicating the Hindus have sunk deep roots.