

Podcast 32 – Surf Life Saving in Australia

Learn English while learning about daily life in Australia,
with Rob McCormack

Podcast Number 32 – Surf Life Saving in Australia

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Hi,

In a previous podcast, I talked about Australia's wonderful beaches. While they are great places to spend time and enjoy yourself in the summer, they can also be dangerous places. The biggest danger is from drowning.

Drownings at the beach have been a problem in Australia since the early 1900s. By 1905, rules had been removed which had stopped people from swimming at beaches in Sydney. Swimming at Sydney's beaches started to become very popular. Unfortunately, some of these people were drowning. In 1907, as the number of drownings increased, some Australians at Sydney's Bondi beach had formed a club of volunteers. They patrolled the beach and rescued those swimmers who got into trouble in the water. Today, that first club has grown into what is known in Australia as Surf Life Saving Australia.

Surf Life Saving Australia is made up of 311 surf lifesaving clubs at beaches all around Australia. These clubs have around 167,000 members, all of whom are volunteers. Of these, around 46,000 are members who patrol the beaches. There are also around 63,000 child members under 13 years of age, who are learning what surf lifesaving is all about and also having a lot of fun at the same time. This is the largest volunteer group of life savers anywhere in the world. Since 1907, around 615,000 lives have been saved. That's a great record.



(Port Melbourne Surf Life Saving Club – Greg is one of the patrolling volunteers.)

They save lives by patrolling our popular beaches on the weekends during the summer swimming season, usually between 9.00am and 5.00pm. Often they have a tower or a balcony they can sit in, so they can see out over the beach and over the water.



They encourage swimmers to swim between two flags which they place on the beach. These flags show where it is safe to swim. Swimmers who swim between the flags can be sure that someone is watching them. Should a swimmer get into trouble while in the water between the flags, surf lifesavers will come to their rescue.



Surf lifesavers can use different methods to help the swimmer get back to shore. The lifesaver can swim out and help the swimmer back to shore using a special side swimming stroke. This swimming stroke allows the lifesaver to keep the swimmer afloat and their head above water. Often, the lifesaver can also bring with them a special rescue tube when they swim out, which they can wrap around the swimmer to keep their head above water.



Lifesavers can also paddle out to the swimmer kneeling on a rescue board, which the swimmer can then grab onto to keep afloat. In 2012/13, this was the most frequent method used by surf club lifesavers to rescue swimmers in trouble.



Finally, the lifesaver can use an inflatable rescue boat with a small outboard motor. These small boats are light, fast and agile when used in the surf, even when the waves are quite large.



These boats can also carry a second lifesaver and are able to pick up more than one swimmer if required. Surf lifesavers need special training in order to handle these small boats. Once the swimmer is brought ashore, the surf lifesavers are also able to resuscitate the swimmer if that is required. Resuscitation may be required if a swimmer is not conscious, is not breathing or perhaps their heart has stopped.

This means that, to be a surf lifesaver, you will need to be well trained. Once you turn 15 years of age, you can take a course called the Bronze Medallion. Passing this course will allow you to be part of the beach patrol and beach rescue service as a surf lifesaver, once you have joined a surf club.



A pre-requisite for this course is the requirement to swim 400 metres in deep water, within 9 minutes. I think you would need to be fit and a strong swimmer to do that. That sounds right too. You couldn't rescue someone in the surf if you weren't a strong swimmer yourself. In the Bronze Medallion course, you cover a lot of topics including how to be safe in the surf, understanding the human body, basic first aid, rescue techniques and resuscitation techniques. The Bronze Medallion lifesaving course takes around 45 to 55 hours.

As well as learning all these lifesaving skills, surf lifesavers love to compete against one another in special competitions held at the beach. These skills including distance running on the sand, beach sprints, swimming, rescue board races, surf boat races and many, many more. These competitions are great to watch and are even shown on television. They are called surf carnivals. I can remember the surf carnivals when I was growing up in my home town of Bunbury. Of course, by competing in these events, our surf lifesavers are getting stronger, faster and better at saving lives at the beach, as well as having fun at the same time.

If you come to Australia in the summer and go to the beach, make sure you always swim between the red and yellow flags. They are the colours of Australia's surf lifesavers. That's the safe way to swim at the beach in Australia.



(For more information about Surf Life Saving Australia, please visit <http://sls.com.au/>)

If you have a question or a comment to make, please click on the comments link at the top of this page. Or, you can send me an email at rob@slowenglish.info. I would love to hear from you. Tell me where you live, a little bit about yourself and what you think of my Slow English podcast. I will write back to you, in English of course. Perhaps you could suggest a topic for a future podcast. If you would like to take a short quiz to see if you have understood this podcast, you will also find it on my website. Goodbye until next time.

Rob

Podcast 32 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like. An individual's scores are not recorded.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

afloat = when you are floating

agile = when something can move easily

balcony = a part of a building which is outside the window.
You can stand on it

basic first aid = things you can do if someone is hurt or injured

board = something long and flat that you can lie on

Bondi = a famous and popular beach in Sydney

carnivals = when many competitions are held

clubs = when people join together to do something they like

competitions = when people compete against one another. For example, a race

course = when a teacher teaches you things

dangerous = when you can get hurt or die

different = not the same

drowning = when you go under water and die

encourage = to tell someone that they should do something

flags = a rectangular piece of cloth with special colours and design

frequent = when something happens many times

grab = to hold on

handle = to be able to use something correctly

inflatable rescue boat (IRB) = a small boat made of rubber which is filled with air

lifesaving = to save lives

methods = a way of doing something

outboard motor = a motor which is used in a small boat

paddle = to use your hands and arms to move through the water

patrolled = to go past an area to check that everything is okay

pre-requisite = when something is needed before you can do something else.

previous = something that has gone before

record = a list of the things you have done

removed = to take away

required = when something is needed

requirement = something you must do

rules = things which you must obey. For example, no faster than 60 kmh.

shore = where the ocean meets the land

side = the side of your body

sprints = to run as fast as you can

stroke = a way to swim

surf = when waves reach the beach

topics = things which you talk about

tower = a building which is high up

training = when you learn how to do something

trouble = when something is not right, when there are difficulties

tube = something round

volunteers = when you do some work but do not get paid