

Podcast 76 – Australia's Koalas

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

Podcast Number 76 – Australia's Koalas

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Hi,

The koala, like the kangaroo, is a symbol of Australia. They are found nowhere else in the world. When you see a picture of a koala, you think immediately of Australia. In this podcast I would like to tell you a little about these handsome little bear-like animals.



A koala at Raymond Island, Victoria
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Like kangaroos, koalas are marsupials, which means their young are born very small and immature. Their young are known as joeys and they stay in their mother's pouch for 6 or 7 months while they suckle milk from the mother and continue to grow and mature. Finally they venture out into the world. They continue to stay with their mother and suckle mother's milk until they are about 1 year old, at which time they become fully independent from their mother.

Koalas look just like small bears, although it is important to remember that they are not bears at all. They are marsupials. They have a furry coat which varies in colour from light gray to chocolate brown on their back. The fur on their belly tends to be white. They grow to a body length of about 60 to 85cm with a body weight of about 4 to 15 kg. They eat eucalyptus leaves, which are the leaves of native Australian eucalypt trees found in the Australian bush. They eat around 400gm of these leaves every day, which is quite a lot of leaves when you think about it. Actually, this type of food is not high in calorie or nutritional content. As a result, koalas tend to be sedentary animals. This means that they sleep most of the time and, when they are awake, they tend to move fairly slowly. Each day they spend around 20 hours sleeping and around 4 hours being active. Another interesting point is that they generally don't drink much water, if any. They mostly get all the water they need from the leaves they eat. That's okay, as it means there is no need to head down the tree to the waterhole to get a drink. They just don't have the energy to do that all the time. This means they can happily spend all day perched on a branch high up in a eucalypt tree, sleeping and eating. What a life?!

When it is warm, you will find them resting with their back against a branch, or else lying on a branch on their stomach with their legs hanging down as if they have not a care in the world. Actually, they probably don't, as they don't have any predators. Their main worries are bushfires and droughts.

When it is colder, they can curl themselves up into a tight ball on that same branch, in order to conserve their body warmth. The only time they need to come down from their tree is to move to another tree, which they will do on all four legs. It's a bit like moving to the next restaurant once you have eaten all the best food in your current restaurant.

Sometimes koalas get into the news. For example, in our terrible bushfires of 2009 here in Victoria, many wild animals lost their lives as the ferocious flames destroyed the forest and everything in it, including wild koalas. It was a good news story when a firefighter came upon a surviving koala sitting amongst the blackened trees. She was very thirsty and had burns to her paws, but it was a great sight to see the firefighter giving the koala, nicknamed Sam, a much needed drink. Sam was later taken to an animal shelter where she was cared for.

Koalas are only found in the eastern states of Australia – Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. This is why I never got to see a koala in the wild when I was growing up in Western Australia. Of course there were koalas in our local Perth zoo, so we got to see one. But there is something special about seeing a koala in the wild. They seem to be so much at home just sitting back and snoozing away high up in a gigantic eucalypt tree.

Most recently my wife and I had a holiday in a small coastal town called Paynesville here in Victoria. At Paynesville there is a small island called Raymond Island. On Raymond Island they have many wild koalas near and around the township. It was a great experience to walk along the track around the township and see a number of wild koalas just sitting in the trees above us. They all looked so relaxed and at ease, bored even, usually sleeping as we walked under the

trees looking up at them. Sometimes they would open their eyes and stare down at you, just to see how these silly humans are spending their time. I think the life of a koala is not too bad at all.

If you have a question or a comment to make, please leave it in the comments box at the bottom 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. 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 76 Quiz - Did you understand the podcast?

You can take the quiz as many times as you like.

Start quiz

Vocabulary

- ☐ Play active = when you move about a lot
- ☐ Play animal shelter = a place where you can take sick animals and they will be cared for
- ☐ Play at ease = when you are not worrying about anything
- ☐ Play bear-like = looks like or is like a bear, but is not a bear

- Play belly = the stomach
- Play blackened = burnt in a fire, becomes black
- Play bored = when you are not interested in something
- Play branch = part of a tree which has leaves
- Play burns = when a fire damages your skin
- Play calorie = a way to measure how much energy is in food
- Play conserve = to save
- Play content = the parts that something is made of
- Play continue = to keep going
- Play curl = to make yourself into a circle
- Play current = now
- Play destroyed = when something has been broken or burnt or smashed
- Play droughts = when it has not rained for a long time
- Play eucalyptus = a type of tree found in Australia
- Play experience = when you have done something before
- Play ferocious = very violent
- Play flames = the hot part of a fire
- Play furry = when an animal has fine hair all over their body
- Play gigantic = very large
- Play handsome = good looking (usually used for animals or for men)

- Play humans = people
- Play immediately = straight away, now
- Play independent = when you can do things for yourself, without help from your mother or father
- Play mature = to become grown up
- Play nicknamed = when you are given a special name by your friends that is not your real name
- Play nowhere else = only at this place
- Play nutritional = describes the things in food which is used by the body
- Play paws = the end of an animals legs
- Play perched = sitting on a branch
- Play pouch = a small pocket on the belly of the koala
- Play predators = an animal which hunts another animal for food
- Play relaxed = when you are sitting quietly
- Play silly = crazy
- Play snoozing = lightly sleeping
- Play suckle = when a baby gets milk from its mother teat
- Play surviving = when you are still alive even after a crash or a fire or other dangerous event
- Play symbol = something which makes you think of something else
- Play tend = is likely to be
- Play township = that part of a town where the houses are

□ Play varies = changes

□ Play venture = to go, usually to somewhere not very friendly

□ Play waterhole = a hole in the ground where water collects – used by animals to get a drink