

COOL STUFF Stamps

about



Behind the scenes

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Why collect stamps?

Stamp collecting remains one of the most popular hobbies in Australia, with many people still enjoying this fantastic pastime.

There are heaps of reasons people collect stamps, but the main one is that it's fun. Lots of people begin collecting because they like the designs on particular stamps, or through an interest in a favourite topic – like sports, animals or space exploration. Stamp collecting is a great way to learn about other countries, particular subjects or obscure facts.

SURFING SANTA



In 1977, Australia issued one of its most controversial stamps ever. This was the Surfing Santa 15c Christmas stamp, designed by Roger Roberts. The drawing of Santa Claus riding a surfboard to deliver presents caused many

complaints from people around Australia. Before the Surfing Santa stamp was printed, leading church authorities were consulted about the design and they had no objection. A minority of people in a national public opinion survey, conducted before the stamp was issued, disliked Surfing Santa. There were many more critics of Surfing Santa once the stamp appeared.

AUSTRALIA'S MOST VALUABLE STAMP



The 1854–55 four pence stamp of Western Australia, featuring a frame of lettering that is inverted in relation to the swan, was reproduced on this 1990 stamp. Only 14 examples of the original error stamp are known to exist today, one of which was sold in Switzerland in 2018 for A\$425,000. For the stamp's size and weight it is probably Australia's most valuable object!

WHY WERE STAMPS INVENTED?

Before stamps were invented, the person who received the letter had to pay a delivery charge. As you can imagine, many letters were returned to senders undelivered because people refused to pay!

How are stamps designed?

Most countries make their stamp designs works of art. In Australia, all stamps are issued by Australia Post, which also produces stamps for Christmas Island, Norfolk Island, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands and the Australian Antarctic Territory. Many other stamp-related products are produced in addition to stamps.

Each year several hundred million stamps are printed. Designs are commissioned with great care to maintain the high quality and reputation of Australian stamps.

A lot of themes for stamp issues are suggestions from the public. People write to Australia Post all the time with ideas on what would look great on a stamp. Other ideas come from anniversaries, events and special occasions, as well as from our research team.

Stamp designs are created in a variety of ways. Graphic designers, artists or photographers are commissioned to produce original images for stamps, or existing images from the collections of galleries, museums or libraries might be used. Each finished stamp must include the word "Australia" and the price. Producing designs that work at such a small size is not an easy task.

The designer also needs to place the year of issue on the stamp, small enough not to interfere with the design but big enough to read. (It's lots of fun to try and find these on your stamps with a magnifying glass.) Australia Post has only been putting the year on stamps since 1989 – see if you can find any Australian stamps that don't have a year on them.

Fun Fact

In 1973 Bhutan issued a stamp that looked like a record. Put it on a record player and it will actually play the Bhutanese national anthem!



Jo Muré, Australia Post stamp designer

AUSTRALIA'S YOUNGEST DESIGNER



Australian children have been given the opportunity to design some of our postage stamps. Australia's youngest stamp designer is Holly Alvarez of Perth, who was five years old when her design for a 1983 Christmas stamp was chosen in a national competition involving primary school children.

How stamps are printed



Australian stamps are printed using a process called offset lithography. Offset printing is fast and is ideal for producing large quantities of printed material.

Our stamps are colourful but, believe it or not, most of them are printed with just four coloured inks: cyan (bright blue), magenta (pink), yellow and black! When different percentages of each colour are combined, they produce the huge range of colours we see on our stamps. All four colours are printed on a stamp in a single operation.

If you look closely at a stamp that has been printed with this four-colour process, you can see that the picture is made up of a pattern of tiny coloured dots.

DOTS UNDER A
MAGNIFYING GLASS



We want proof

The first few sheets to be printed are called “proofs”. The proofs are inspected closely for any errors or colour variations before the final printing begins. If there are any faulty sheets they are destroyed. The large sheets are then perforated and cut into smaller sheets for delivery to post offices.

Invisible ink

Part of every stamp is invisible to our eyes. It can only be seen by Australia Post’s sorting machines. A special phosphorescent coating is on the stamp. An ultraviolet light shows up the coating. This is what the sorting machine uses to position the stamp for cancellation (postmarking).

Lick or stick

Stamps can be printed on gummed paper that you have to lick or dampen so they stick to an envelope. You can also get self-adhesive stamps. In fact four out of five of all stamps printed are self-adhesive. Because these stamps stick better, a special paper had to be developed for Australia Post so that you can still soak stamps off envelopes for your collection!

Perforations

Sheets of stamps are perforated so they can be easily separated. Rows of hard steel pins called “combs” punch small holes in the sheets between the stamps. Self-adhesive stamps are made to peel off a backing-sheet but they still have the same perforated appearance. Check it out next time you purchase a book of stamps.



Medallion cover

INTAGLI-WHAT?



Many old stamps were printed using an engraving process called intaglio. The design was engraved or etched into a flat metal plate. The design plate was created by using lots of finely spaced lines to produce different shades. Originally this was all done by hand! The engraver was a highly skilled craftsman.

What stamp

is that?

DEFINITIVE STAMPS

Definitive stamps have stamp values that are commonly used and therefore they stay in circulation for a long time. The most common definitive value is for posting a standard letter.

THEMATIC STAMPS

Many people collect stamps that have a common theme, such as flowers, cars, dinosaurs, space travel or fairy tales. Others collect stamps that commemorate a special event like the Olympic Games, or a special time like Christmas. Stamp collections based on a particular theme will usually include stamps issued in different years and from different countries.

COMMEMORATIVE STAMPS

Commemorative stamps celebrate social or historical events that are of national importance.

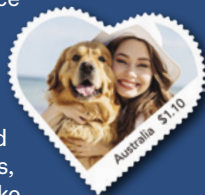
PERSONALISED STAMPS

Personalised stamps allow a photograph to be printed on the tab of a valid postage stamp and can be produced featuring photos of individuals, family, friends or favourite pets. In 1999 Australia introduced the world's first personalised stamps. Customers can upload a picture, which is placed on a "tab" next to an existing stamp design. auspost.com.au/pstamps



MYSTAMPS

MyStamps is an online service that lets customers put an image directly into a stamp shape, to create their own sheetlet of stamps. Choose from our range of shapes and stick them on your invitations, greeting cards or gifts to make them stand out. auspost.com.au/mystamps



LEGENDS STAMPS

Australia once had a rule that no living person (except the Queen and members of her family) could be shown on stamps in their own right. In 1997 the first "Australian Legends" stamps were issued honouring Sir Donald Bradman, Australia's most famous cricketer.



INSTANT STAMPS

During the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games the world's first instant stamps were produced for every Australian athlete or team winning a gold medal. Instant stamps have been produced for each summer and winter Olympic Games to honour Australian gold medallists.

MINT OR USED?

When someone collects mint stamps it doesn't mean they are collecting flavoured stamps! Mint stamps are simply unused stamps.

If you like to collect Australian mint stamps the best place to go is your post office. Stamp dealers will have new (mint) stamps from other countries. Other people like to collect used stamps. This means the stamps have been used for postage and have gone through the mail system. You can then soak them off the envelope and add them to your collection. Collecting used stamps is the cheapest way to collect stamps. Ask your family and friends to save all their envelopes that come through the mail, then you can add these to your collection.

If you want to get heaps of different stamps at once you can buy packets of used stamps with different themes, like cats, dogs, bikes, birds, fish and cars. Or you can buy a big packet of mixed stamps and have fun sorting them into your own themes.

HOW IT ALL BEGAN: AUSTRALIA'S FIRST POSTMARK

A special mark was first stamped on letters in Great Britain in 1661, to show when a letter was received by the post office. These early postmarkers were made of wood, something like the rubber stamp today. Australia's first postmarker was used in Sydney in about 1812 but unlike the British postmark did not include a date. Australia did not start placing dates on postmarks until 1830.



Fun Fact

The smallest ever stamp (9.5mm x 8mm) was issued in 1863 by the Columbian state of Bolivar.

HOW CAN YOU TELL IF A STAMP IS NEW OR USED?

A used stamp will be postmarked.

Postmarking is when a rubber stamp is used to place an impression over part of the stamp and envelope with ink. This postmark will tell you when and where the stamp was posted. New stamps do not have postmarks on them. They are called mint stamps and can be bought from the post office or stamp dealers. Mint stamps come in a whole variety of formats: there are sheets of stamps, minisheets, self-adhesive sheetlets and much, much more. There are so many ways to collect mint stamps! For different types of collectables, check out the "More Cool Stuff to Collect" page.

Fun Fact

Australia began to issue Christmas stamps annually in 1957 and was the first country in the world to do so.



Tools to use

Stamp tweezers are special tweezers because they have blunt ends so that they will not damage stamps. Stamp dealers and post offices sell them.

A magnifying glass will help you see small details. You can use your magnifying glass to search for the year on the Australian stamps in your collection. It will be in very tiny figures and tucked away somewhere in the stamp design.

Some serious collectors use a perforation gauge to measure the size of perforations on their stamps. Sometimes a reprint of a stamp design may have different perforations from the original.

Stamp lingo



COVER is just another name for an envelope.

COMMEMORATIVE stamps celebrate social or historical events that are of national importance.

DEFINITIVE stamps have stamp values that are commonly used and they therefore stay in circulation for a long time. The most common definitive value is for posting a standard letter.

HINGES are small pieces of paper gummed on both sides. They are used for mounting stamps in an album.

MINT stamps are in perfect condition. They have not been through the postal system and have not been postmarked.

PHILATELY (pronounced fil-at-a-lee) is the study of things related to stamp collecting and postage. If you want to sound really important, you can call yourself a philatelist (pronounced fil-at-a-list).

STAMP DEALERS buy and sell Australian and overseas stamps.

POSTMARKS are the official marks put on stamps to stop people using the stamps again. Postmarks also show when and where letters were posted.

PERFORATIONS are the lines of small holes punched between stamps so they can be torn apart easily. Early stamps had no perforations, and individual stamps were cut from stamp sheets with scissors.

STAMP CATALOGUES show all the stamps ever produced by a particular country and also give their values as mint and as postmarked stamps.

STAMP MOUNTS are used to put stamps on pages (instead of hinges).

USED STAMPS have been postmarked while going through the mail.

Organising your stamp album

A stamp album can really help show off your collection. There are many types to choose from, but one of the most popular is a loose-leaf album, with separate sheets in a binder. The separate sheets help you to organise your album any way you want and you can add new sheets to your collection whenever you need to.



Show off your collection

You can make your stamp album more interesting by writing about the stamps, such as when and why they were issued or the designers' names. Transparent stamp mounts or stamp hinges are the best way of storing your stamps without damaging them. Never lick stamps to stick them in your album, and never use glue or stamp tape! It will ruin the stamps.



Your local post office will be able to show you the latest stamp kits and albums to get you started.

STAMP COLLECTING MONTH

In August each year Australia Post celebrates Stamp Collecting Month. Although this annual stamp issue only commenced in 1993, a huge range of philatelic products and other promotional material has been

produced for Stamp Collecting Month, making it an interesting collecting theme. Check out the current stamp collecting month stamps at: auspost.com.au/scm



Ideas for collecting stamps

POSTAL NUMISMATIC COVERS (STAMP AND COIN COVERS)

These are special first day covers that contain a coin that relates to the stamp theme. The coins that we use in these covers are either from The Perth Mint or the Royal Australian Mint. The first PNC that Australia Post ever issued was for International Year of the Family in 1994.



SECRET YEAR INSCRIPTION ON STAMPS

Since 1989 all Australian stamps have had the year of issue printed on them. Stamps from 1989 onwards are a great collecting idea. See how many stamps you can find with a year on them. The year also appears on Australia Post issues for the Australian Antarctic Territory, Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

AUSTRALIAN ANTARCTIC TERRITORY

Since 1957 separate stamps have been issued for mail posted from the three mainland stations in Antarctica and from the station on sub-Antarctic Macquarie Island. AAT stamps, which can also be used on letters posted in Australia, mostly feature Antarctic fauna, landscapes, exploration and scientific research.

REPTILES AND INSECTS

Reptiles or insects have been featured on many Australian fauna stamps since the first Reptiles stamp series was issued in 1982. With many "scary" creatures shown, this could be a fun theme to collect.

MARINE LIFE STAMPS

Marine life featured on Australian and territories stamps is a good theme for a collection. In particular, whales and dolphins on stamps have wide appeal and many Australian and territories stamps have featured these marine mammals.

OLYMPICS

The first Olympics-themed Australian stamp was issued in 1956. Since 1968 stamps have been issued to celebrate Australia's participation in each Olympic Games. Australia hosted the Olympic Games in 1956 and 2000 and the Commonwealth Games in 1962, 1982, 2006 and 2018.

More cool stuff to collect

FIRST DAY COVERS are available on the first day new stamps are issued. These have a picture on the envelope and a special postmark that relates to the stamp issue. Some people have collections made up only of first day covers.

MINISHEETS are small sheets of stamps, often designed so that the stamps make up part of a larger picture.

MAXICARDS are picture postcards with one stamp and a special first day of issue postmark.

SOUVENIR STAMP SHEETS are special stamp sheets that are produced for certain events, such as the AFL and NRL grand finals or the announcement of the Brownlow Medallist.

STAMP PACKS are folders containing a new set of stamps in mint condition. Information about the stamp theme is printed on the pack.

SHEETLETS are small sheets, usually with 10 stamps that may be the same or different designs.



FIRST DAY COVER



SELF-ADHESIVE SHEETLET



MINISHEET



STAMP PACK

Teachers and students

auspost.com.au/education

FIND OUT MORE!

The Australia Post Education website is an easy way of exploring the many aspects of Australia's postal system. It contains some interesting information as well as activities.

There are many ideas to encourage students to write letters and extend their learning through stamp designs.

There is a section containing teachers resources, which are grouped by grade level. A teacher guide with lesson plan and activity ideas is included with most student resources.

The website also provides information on how to write to Santa at Christmas time.

SUBSCRIBE TO THE STAMP BULLETIN

Our free bi-monthly *Stamp Bulletin* features glossy images of our upcoming stamp issues and coin releases. You can download the *Stamp Bulletin* or subscribe to our mailing list and we'll send you the Bulletin for free! Visit australiapostcollectables.com.au to subscribe.

The collectables website, listed above, also contains lots of interesting information on current and previous stamp issues, coins, postmarking and how to get your own stamp collection started.

SMART IDEA

Why not ask your parents or grandparents if they used to collect stamps when they were young.

They may have their own stamp album tucked away somewhere. Stamp collecting can bring back so many great memories! It's fun to collect, and you might like to encourage your family to start collecting stamps again. There is so much to learn about different subjects – the stories and history behind each stamp are fascinating, and of course it can be a great family activity!

