The Australian Community Spirit

As a reminder of what Australians love about their communities, here’s a summary of 5 values and characteristics that define this community spirit:

PRIDE:

Australians have a deep pride in our country and culture which is more often felt than spoken. Our understated Aussie spirit stands in contrast to the overt nationalism expressed in other countries. Forrest in Sydney says “We don’t seem inhibited by the fact we’re at the end of the world”. In the hearts of most Australians the love of this land, her people and achievements just is. As Susan from Clifton Beach NSW writes “Our eternal optimism, “She’ll be right mate” attitude in a world of negativity!”

This national self confidence comes perhaps because there is so much of which to be proud. From the beaches to the outback, from the red centre to the rainforests, Australia provides a long list of the world’s best. Yet when Australians talk about what makes them proud, the conversation turns not just to our land but to our cultural and artistic achievements, medical and technological innovations, and sporting success.

“There’s more to it than beaches” writes Zachery from Lyons River, WA, “its development and technology, medical studies and sports technology. That’s how Australia sets itself apart.”

FUN:

From our colourful language to our unique humour, the Aussie spirit is one of fun. Only in Australia is a redhead called “Bluey”, and a stranger is called “mate”. Phil from Glebe sums this up well “This is what I like about Australia - we can laugh at ourselves in the face of adversity: The Pacific Dawn docked a few years back after its Swine flu troubles and the passengers chant: Aussie! Aussie! Aussie! Oink! Oink! Oink!”

Our irony is warm, our wit is self deprecating and our inter-state rivalries always good natured. Peter in Sydney stirs the pot with “Waking up knowing I don’t live in Melbourne lifts my mood on an almost daily basis.” There exists an earthy humility that resists self-
promotion and embraces the larrikin. Perhaps in a reaction to British formality or born of survival in this harsh land, Australians developed a “no worries” attitude and a strong sense of fun. As Dan from Albanvale Victoria writes, “Where else would you get a day off for a horse race?”

TEAMWORK:

Australia is collaborative rather than individualistic. As Aussies we recognize that individual achievement rarely occurs without a helping hand from others. After all we call this the lucky country- we don’t take the credit for it all ourselves. The community spirit- helping out your mate and your neighbour alike shines strongly in the Australian psyche. As Ian from Belair, SA says “Australians are legendary for their generosity and ability to collaborate to get things done”.

This teamwork, a mix of mateship and altruism, sets us apart from other cultures. It gives us a sense of belonging to something bigger than the individual and empowers a “can do” attitude. Jeff, from Balmain, proudly states “Our camaraderie sets us apart; the way we band together as a team and support one another, yet competitively push each other to greater heights”.

COMMUNITY:

Whether at a street, city, state or nationally level, the Australian spirit unites us not just to celebrate success, but also to battle adversity. Having experienced such diverse and sometimes harsh environments and situations, Australians do not shy away from hardship, yet bond together to tackle it. As Tim, from Camberwell, VIC, states “What makes Australia great is the way we band together when things get tough”.

Our 21st Century community is a richly diverse one. Our cultural mix is in our national DNA, it’s part of our lifestyle- it’s who we are. The fact that more than 1 in 4 of us weren’t born here seems unremarkable- as though it has always been thus. As Tammy from Bulleen, Victoria states “On an average day, I can have bacon and eggs for breakfast; sushi for lunch; and Greek for dinner. While in between, I can squeeze in some yoga; a French film; and marvel at Indigenous art.”
FREEDOM:

The Australian spirit is enlightened and motivated by our endless opportunities and equality for all. The freedom to pursue our dreams in this land gives everyone the chance to “make it”. As Woo from Highgate Hill, Queensland points out “You do not need to be ANYONE to be someone in Australia! It’s the ‘come over for a cuppa’ kinda attitude that makes an Aussie an Aussie”

Freedom in Australia is not expressed in political or civic terms as much as lifestyle and cultural terms. It is a theme not tied to our history or constitution (like in the US) but tied strongly to our landscape, and our attitude. As Paul from Darling Point Sydney states “Australia has a sense of ‘anything’s possible’ and where hard work and commitment can lead to a very rewarding life. The wide open spaces and clear skies allow the spirit to feel “free” which translates into a real sense of freedom and possibility”.

Mark McCrindle, Social Researcher is hosting the Australian Communities Forum in Sydney, November 2012