Good Health in The Centre

A booklet for people planning to live in Central Australia

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# GOOD HEALTH IN THE CENTRE

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Alice and The Centre

Alice Springs is about half-way between Adelaide and Darwin. It provides the commercial nucleus for the whole Alice Springs and Barkly Regions of the Northern Territory. These regions involve many Aboriginals and Europeans living and working in isolated areas. The Alice is a fast-growing town that boasts modern facilities and progressive development readily seen by the many new supermarkets, shops, medical centres and office buildings.

Fortunately, the characteristic outback flavour has managed to survive all this modernization, and a touch of the old pioneering spirit still lingers. At the turn of the century Alice Springs was just a quaint little outpost serving the epic overland telegraph.

By 1980, however, the population was nearing the 17,000 mark and was conservatively predicted to continue growing at the steady rate of at least four per cent each year.

"The Alice" is now very much a tourist town. The pastoral industry might have provided the backbone for early settlement, but tourism has become the major money earner of today. The busiest tourist months are between April and September.

Good health in Central Australia is naturally boosted with an average of nine hours sunshine a day, as much fresh unpolluted air as anyone could wish for, and a pleasantly relaxed way of life that attracts many people.

Weather Watch

Maximum temperatures in Alice Springs are at least 26°C for nearly eight months of the year and even the coldest of winter days usually warm to around the 15°C mark. In December, January and February, temperatures often exceed 35°C for several weeks at a stretch. But no matter how hot these days get, the evenings usually cool down to provide an ideal setting for barbecues, outside entertainment and sporting activities. Most people are well aware of Central Australia's high summer temperatures. What they often don't realize, is that the still sunny months of June and July can become surprisingly cold.

Temperatures at this time of the year quite frequently zoom down to freezing point by midnight and frost warnings are actually common. Fortunately, temperatures thaw out by lunchtime next day and can become pleasantly warm during most winter afternoons.
In short, it is hot in summer and cold and sunny in winter. Rain produces about 40 wet days a year and averages 246 mm. An arid region, it usually receives most of its rainfall in the summer months, but is, of course, open to seasonal change. The 1970's for example, came up with several excellent seasons in succession. Pastoralists, however, are quick to recall the serious drought years of the 1960's. Good health says: the climate of Central Australia invites a refreshing year-round emphasis on outdoor living and activities.

Help with Housing

Having made the decision to move, there are several practical steps you can take to help things run more smoothly.
You need to understand that houses or flats are not readily available for rental through the Housing Commission, or even through the local real estate agents. There is often a waiting list of at least six months for rented accommodation. However, those wanting to purchase a house will probably find a ready market and a fair choice.
Don't arrive in Alice Springs assuming that a job and permanent accommodation will be readily available. These things need sorting out with a brief visit first, or at least with some previous correspondence and preliminary preparation.
It is important to understand that those requiring Public or Staff Housing must register an application through the Housing Commission Office.
Registration can only be placed when you actually arrive to take up residence. It cannot be arranged during a brief visit, or even through correspondence.
This is why it is so important to arrange private accommodation for your immediate arrival. Unless, of course, your employer is prepared to do this for you.
Many people decide to live in hostels or caravan parks while waiting for housing. But remember that these also receive heavy bookings, especially during the main tourist season. Some employers will provide or subsidize temporary accommodation. Check this out carefully and have any arrangement in writing.
All Housing Commission accommodation is termed 'Public Housing', and all Northern Territory Public Service housing is now labelled 'Staff Housing'.
Most of the houses have pleasant and inoffensive colour schemes that leave plenty of choice for the scope of soft furnishings. You may well choose to shop for curtain material in your home town, but several fabric shops offer a very good choice in Alice.
All Staff and Public Housing is handled by the Housing Commission in Parsons Street. Postal address: P.O. Box 2209, Alice Springs, N.T. 5750. Any Commonwealth employee housing matters should be directed to the Government Centre, Parsons Street. Postal address: P.O. Box 7, Alice Springs, N.T. 5750. Private accommodation can be negotiated by mail through any of the local real estate agents listed in the Territory phone book. When writing re housing, remember to give details of family size, needs, your employment and any accommodation preferences. Comment on your financial situation and state whether or not you will be registering with the Housing Commission when you arrive in Alice Springs.

**Centralian Housing Commission**

Shops and Shopping

Alice Springs must have more central shops per square kilometre than almost any other town of comparable size in Australia. There was a time when Todd Street was the only shopping centre, but there have been many changes over the past few years and now there is quite a variety of supermarkets and shopping complexes. However, not all subdivisions have a supermarket nearby, or even a ‘corner store’ for everyday items. This will be an important point for you to consider when you know that public transport is not readily available. Food stores on the whole offer an excellent variety of goods. You will find though, that prices in many cases will be higher than those you are used to. As is the case wherever you live, it is worth checking out several stores before buying.
The most difficult items on your list will probably be fresh fruit and vegetables. They will certainly be amongst the most expensive. Perishables are either railed up from Adelaide or brought in from Queensland. Either way, the distance is quite considerable and delays are not uncommon. Really fresh fruit and veges are somewhat of a luxury in Central Australia.

Good health says: buy fruit and vegetables when they are available. Clean and store them carefully. Never overcook them, and be prepared to substitute with dried or tinned products. Milk also deserves a special mention. It is supplied in cardboard containers and comes from Adelaide in refrigerated vans. Check the dates on the cartons before purchasing.

Once opened, the fresh milk does not keep very well unless transferred to an airtight container. Even then its life is often short lived. Few mothers feed their babies with this milk in Central Australia. If they are not breast feeding they tend to use the more reliable powdered or liquid products that can be bought and stored safely in fairly large quantities. Always have a little extra in store for those 'rainy days'.

Good health suggests: that before moving to Alice Springs you think of changing a bottle fed baby to powdered or liquid milk instead of using fresh milk. This is better done gradually in familiar surroundings than in all the hurly burly of a move.

Frozen goods are very popular due to the unreliable supply of fresh foods. But be extra careful when shopping in summer, not to let frozen foods thaw out before transferring them to your own freezer. Never re-freeze frozen foods. When buying smallgoods packed in plastic or see-through containers, check for tell-tale signs of mildew, dryness or poor colouring. And once again, keep an eye on those dates. In summer time, shop with youngsters early in the morning or late afternoon. Never lock or leave an infant in the car. You will find most stores are airconditioned. The availability of larger items such as appliances, tools, building materials and household equipment, varies considerably.
Nearly all goods have to be transported some thousands of kilometres into Central Australia. There are bound to be limitations and delays. The new Tarcoola standard gauge railway will ease many transport problems and uncertainties. And when the South Road is finally sealed all the way to Adelaide, the wholesalers’ and commercial outlets will be amongst the first to celebrate! Clothes stores in Alice provide a very good service. If you really have problems, though, there is always the mail order system offered by big city department stores. It would be fair comment to say, that on the whole shopkeepers in Central Australia do an excellent job.

Employment Opportunities

Although the population of Central Australia has stabilized considerably in the past ten years, there are still many young people who pass through on a working holiday. The Employment Bureau does what it can to place people in jobs, but not always is there work available for everyone. Some folk live in the town for just a couple of years and do not intend making Alice their permanent home. These factors produce a perpetual pattern of change on the employment scene.
Con contrad to popular belief, the local school leavers usually represent only a small number of the unemployed. Of course, many of them leave town and go interstate. The Commonwealth Employment Service in Alice Springs serves a huge area of the Alice Springs and Barkly Regions of the Northern Territory, from the South Australian border to Tennant Creek.
The Northern Territory Public Service is the largest employer in the Territory and provides a wide field of employment opportunities. In the Alice Springs town area the most consistent private employers are those in the retail industry, tourist oriented operations and support services, and the pastoral, building and transport industries. Jobs are advertised in the local press, on local radio, through the Government Gazette and at the new Alice Springs Job Centre in the FAI Building which is situated on the corner of Gregory Terrace and Bath Street.
Making the Move

Having sorted out the housing situation you will know that nearly all Housing Commission homes are now rented in an unfurnished state. They are only supplied with stoves and hot water services. This is another reason why having a privately furnished flat or house arranged for immediate occupancy will help smooth things over. Hotel or motel living can become rather tedious after a while, and sorting things out in comfort (especially with a family), can make all the difference. Before leaving your home town bear in mind that Alice Springs is at least 1,500 km from the nearest big city discount stores. You may well choose to replace some of your furniture and even some of your appliances before moving away from the discount prices!

You will need to ascertain very carefully just who exactly is paying for your move, the insurance of your goods in transit, and the storage. This may be paid totally by your employer, in part only, or not at all. Have any promise for payment in writing and make sure you know exactly where you stand.

Another little tip suggests that you think very hard before deciding to sell a second car prior to the move. Public transport in Alice Springs is not exactly one of its best points! It is far better to bring all the bits of mobile gear with you, whether bicycles, motor bikes or cars. If they are not required, then it is easy enough to sell them in Alice. But at least give yourself the freedom of choice and the opportunity to assess your own particular needs in your new environment.

Keeping Cool

Spring gives way to summer around late September when temperatures from then until March will usually reach or surpass the 30°C mark. Large windows facing west are best avoided or at least protected. You will find that awnings, lined curtains, blinds, verandahs and trees are all good investments to help shade the house and keep it cool.

Many families have now come to regard evaporative coolers as essential pieces of equipment, although sometimes ceiling and mobile fans or occasionally, refrigerated air conditioners are preferred.
Of course, great care is needed with the use of mobile fans when young children are in the home. Even ceiling fans can be dangerous in bedrooms that have bunk beds as well as youngsters! A couple of firm family rules should give everyone peace of mind.

The evaporative coolers are either ducted through the roof or the floor, with vents directing the cool air directly into most rooms. They are very effective in low humidity, and certainly a safe unit. Some homes have a mobile fan handy for those few humid days.

Evaporative coolers work very hard for at least five months of the year. They deserve a great deal of respect and really earn a thorough annual servicing and clean-up. If this is given, they cause few problems.

During the four hottest months of the year you will find it better to leave the cooler going 24 hours a day than to expect it to work overtime once the house has warmed up.

At the end of summer, remember to empty all water from the cooler tray and cover the unit. Most people use canvas or plastic covering to reduce cold draughts and dust that are all too inclined to find their way into the house during winter.

The main overhaul for evaporative coolers is usually given in September when the winter dust can be cleaned out and the unit serviced. The pads will need checking for any replacements and accumulated salts should be scraped from the sides. The fan, the pump and all ball bearings should be inspected and serviced if necessary.

If this sort of maintenance work is not ‘your thing’, then contact one of the local firms that will do the job for you.

Make sure before renting or buying a house, that you have carefully checked out the existing cooling methods provided by the owner. Is there a functional system? How effective is it? And if there is no cooler installed, is there ducting built into the house to provide for one? Remember that you will need some form of reliable house cooling for about five months of the year, which can be a long time to put up with something that does not work very well!

Good health says: summer is a breeze when the house is kept cool and you can rest comfortably at night.
Clothing Clobber

Long gloves, exotic ball gowns, bow ties and tails — these are not really part of the Alice Springs scene. Not unless you happen to want it that way!

The various official ‘do’s’ and weddings usually have ‘Territory Formal’ written in fine print on the invitation. But this means a suit, plain shirt and neat tie for the guys, and an ‘after five’ outfit of whatever length happens to be in fashion for the girls. The informality in Central Australia calls mainly for casual clothing; an attitude many people find most attractive.

All the same we have to be careful here. Don’t let these comments give you the impression that nobody ever ‘dresses up’. It pays to make a few discreet enquiries before going out for the evening.

Before leaving your home town, remember to pack at least some of your winter woolies for the frosty months of June and July. An overcoat can even be handy at night.

Of course, the warmer months take up most of the year and demand light-weight clothing and lots of casual gear. Cotton fabrics are the most comfortable in mid-summer, but the crease-resistant synthetic materials certainly have their uses. Most guys wear tailored shorts to work in the September to April season; shorts, long socks and open neck shirts; while the girls tend to rely on a neat casual look that suits their own ideas. Basically, you ‘do your own thing’. Nobody minds, and there are plenty of clothing shops in town to help you out if need be.

Education

Education in Alice Springs is available from pre-school to grade twelve level. Post-compulsory courses include leisure activities as well as diploma and degree study through the Community College.

Alice Springs is a young town. This fact is made very obvious to anyone walking down the main street on a Saturday morning or checking out the various sporting complexes at weekends.

The highest adult age group in population figures is represented by the 25 to 29 year olds. The next highest is 30 to 34. This may explain the need for as many as six pre-schools and six primary schools in the Alice Springs area alone.

A second high school called Sadadeen opened in 1979 to relieve pressure on the Alice Springs High School. The A.S.H.S. is in the Gillen area west of the town, and the Sadadeen High School is on the Eastside.

Alice Springs may well have suffered in the past with many teachers just passing through and not staying for long. But a stabilizing process is taking place and school staffing is now more permanent.

Students of the Alice Springs High School can progress to matriculation standard and become eligible for the South Australian Public Examination Board subjects required for University entrance.
Those not wanting tertiary education have the choice of an internal year in twelfth grade. Children attend the school nearest their home and make use of the school bus service for transport or ride their bikes. Those choosing to attend school in a different area to the one in which they live must provide their own transport.

In most cases uniforms are not compulsory but they are required for the Catholic School. Every school has sensible rules about clothing generally, and in the hot summer months shoes and socks are “out” — and cool comfortable open sandals are “in”.

Post-compulsory or adult education is certainly not new to Alice Springs. But the American concept of a Community College is a fairly recent innovation in Australia. It came to The Centre in 1974.

A Community College differs from a Technical College or Colleges of Advanced Education, in that it is able to offer a wide range of recreational courses as well as those designed for diplomas or degrees. A Community College aims to be multi-level, multi-purpose and very flexible so that it readily tunes into the needs of the community it serves.

Courses vary from cake decorating to commercial studies; from Aboriginal education programs to aircraft engineering; and from electrical trades to international cookery. Enrolment figures are constantly at a high level so that some of the courses are booked out very quickly. Current courses are announced in the local press at the beginning of each term. Bookings are made at the College.

The Community College of Central Australia is now independent of the Darwin Community College. It is able to conduct award courses through various institutions such as the Warmambool Institute for Advanced Education, the South Australian College of External Studies, and Queensland University. Whether it is the climate of Alice, the awareness of geographical isolation, or perhaps the central location of the College near Anzac Hill — or all three, is not clear. But what is very clear indeed, is the enormous popularity of classes held both day and night. The College plays an important role within the community.
When it Rains

It usually doesn’t rain very often in Central Australia. But when rain does fall, you cannot help but be glad for the country. Too bad about the washing! On the whole, Alice Springs only scores an average of around forty rainy days a year. It is unusual for sporting fixtures or outdoor plans to be cancelled due to inclement weather. Although the annual rainfall average is less than 250 mm, even arid zone climates experience exceptional seasons. The 1970’s are a good example. On the few occasions when heavy rain really sets in, the usually dry river beds can spring to life with amazing speed and strength. When this happens the roads soon flood at causeways and may well be cut for several days. This is when Territory transport can become a big problem and the geographic isolation of Alice Springs is underlined. Hopefully the new standard guage Tarcoola railway will provide the all-weather link that is so badly needed. However, most people will probably continue to keep an extra stock of tinned, dried or frozen food tucked away in the kitchen ‘just in case’. Rainy days do not present very often, so few women bother with clothes driers. All that lovely sunshine usually does the job very well indeed. But if rain really persists, then clothes can be dried under verandahs or car ports, or at any of several laundromats in town.

Solar Energy

Solar hot water heaters are now widely used in the Alice Springs region. And so they should be! These very efficient and economical water heaters only require about three hours sunshine a day to meet most family needs. An electrical booster switch can be operated during long cloudy periods. Most solar hot water systems are trouble-free throughout summer, but there is a chance that in winter the pipes, connections or plates might freeze up and burst. It can be quite alarming to see water pouring from the roof when this occurs, and although it is the exception rather than the rule, it is better to be prepared and know what to do.
The problem of a burst solar plate or pipe becomes apparent when the early morning sun melts the surrounding ice. The first burst of water can be very hot, so it is important to keep the kids well away from the area while you turn off the main water supply and the electrical booster switch. When this has been done it is time to ring the plumber who will add your name to his list. There will probably be several burst systems in your street, all suffering from the particularly severe patch of frost. While waiting for the plumber it is quite a good idea to collect the last of the hot water in the bath or washing machine. But remember to give the tank time to fill before switching on the electricity booster. Some people actually go to some lengths to cover their solar plates in winter to prevent all this happening. They rely totally on electricity for their hot water all through June and July. Most locals, however, take their chances. A burst solar system is very much the exception rather than the rule.

**Going Bush**

Going bush is a way of life in Central Australia. It is also one of the greatest attractions for many people. Whether just in the family car to visit nearby gaps, gorges and reserves, or travelling far afield in four-wheel-drive vehicles, there are always some precautions which are wise to take before you leave.

It is a good idea to tell a friend or neighbour when and where you plan to go bush, remembering of course, to let them know when you get back! There are two main dangers when packing for a bush trip: that you take too much gear — OR NOT ENOUGH! Somehow you need to strike a happy medium. Obviously, the car should be in good running order before you start. It is also important to have a basic collection of spares and tools. The amount of water and petrol you carry will depend on the trip you plan. While it is not good to overload the car, it is necessary to realise that petrol outlets and fresh water are certainly not readily available. You need to be independent.

The old army jerricans are excellent for carrying petrol, and similar containers are now made in strong plastic which is ideal for water. Never use plastic containers for petrol. Other basics include rope, spade and axe, a torch, matches and an extra supply of non-perishable food — just in case. This food can include dried soups, dried fruit, nuts and maybe a small selection of tinned tucker. You will also need a sensible first aid kit, several large plastic bags for rubbish and a reliable map of the area in which you will be travelling. Extra clothing will depend on the time of the year and the ages of those who are with you. But no matter how hot it gets, always have some light loose cotton clothes to cover arms and legs as well as the body. The sun can come quite fiercely through the car window.

Remember that in winter it gets very cold at night, so proper swags will be needed if you plan camping without tents. Many people never use tents in The Centre, but they carry plenty of canvas and rope to erect shelter if needed.

Good health says: good campers either bury their rubbish deeply or take it home. No litter PLEASE. Always leave a camp site as clean as you would enjoy to find it.
Fortunately we are far more aware of conservation principles than we were ten years ago. The Central Australian bush tends to have a timeless and indestructible quality about it which is emphasised by its isolation and ruggedness.

The balance of our wildlife, however, is a very delicate thing, and its survival is largely dependent on man's careful use. It is important not to be in a hurry when going bush. Not only is it better for the vehicle, but for your own pleasure and enjoyment.

The birds and animals will take off at the sound of your car and the scrunch of your feet. If you have time to stay awhile, though, the birds will come back and the animals will get on with whatever they were doing. Kangaroos and euros usually feed late in the afternoon or early morning. This is when you are most likely to spot them. You may also see a dingo or two, some emus, brumbies or camels. To see the smaller marsupials you will need a little more time.

It is a good idea to carry binoculars and bird books if you are really interested in our feathered friends; and to have handbooks on gemstones and wildflowers for quick identification.

Good health says: for goodness sake wear sensible shoes when bushwalking (snakes are also part of the general wildlife). Use a hat, and carry water with you when bushwalking. Remember to re-apply sunburn cream at regular intervals.

Swimming in waterholes can be great fun, but remember that rock pools amongst the ranges rarely receive direct sun and can be icy cold even on a hot day. Nobody enjoys cramp!

Good health says: never, ever dive into a waterhole without first checking for underwater rocks, ledges, and the general depth.

When travelling bush in summer, it is a good idea to fill the esky with frozen cans of fruit juice, and frozen water in plastic containers. These have drinkable contents when melted and work just as well as ice blocks. It is worth carrying a plastic washing bucket or bowl, especially when infants are in the car. These are very versatile pieces of equipment and are ideal for a tired and hot toddler to cool off with just a couple of inches of water.

It is also conducive to carry fly-nets for the young (and even the not-so-young too!). Make or buy the sort that encase the head and have elastic around the neck. Junior might object at first, but he'll soon get used to the idea.
Most bush trips will be trouble free. There is always the chance, however, that in spite of all your precautions the car will let you down, sand or water will prove too much, or there may even be some sort of accident. If trouble does happen to come your way, try to make an adventure of the whole thing: and if you get stuck for a few hours — well, never mind. The bush roads are not as lonely as you might think, and help is usually forthcoming. (Not only that, remember that you told a friend or neighbour about where you would be.) Never leave your car while you search for help. It is much easier to spot a vehicle in the bush than a person. If things get really desperate, clear an area and light a fire using greenery to make heavy smoke.

The basic technique for driving in the bush is to travel at a leisurely pace, treat cattle grids with caution and watch for cattle and kangaroos on the side of the road. Beware of road trains or trucks, and keep your distance from them. Move well to the left for oncoming trucks to make it possible for them to stay on the bitumen, reduce the risk of flying gravel — and a broken windscreen.

Remember that civil defence and police will usually have the latest information on the state of roads; fire stations can advise on bushfire risk, and there are many clubs and organisations which list interesting “places to go”.

It is good to develop the habit of throwing a few basic items into your car — even if only going for a brief picnic.

Always carry:
* A container of water.
* Length of rope.
* A spade, shovel or axe
* A torch, batteries and matches.
* Some dried food.
* A first aid kit.
* A spare fan belt.

These items can all fit reasonably well into a small box which can “live” permanently in your car. Remember, though, to check the contents from time to time, and to replace the water for each bush trip.

There are many books now available on camping and touring. Jeff Carter’s ‘A Guide To Central Australia’ (pub. by Rigby Ltd.,) is a concise and informative little paperback that covers touring tips, safety driving in the bush, where to go and what to see.
Good Gardening

Most people are surprised at the variety of plants that grow in Central Australia when given regular watering and a little care.
But the garden can tie you down, especially in the summer months — so think first before you go ahead madly planting.
It is quite a good idea to take a few walks or drives to see what others have done and what appeals to you most.
Lawns are a luxury in any arid zone. They are also the result of constant care.
Couch and Kikuyu are the most common grasses used. They are tough, cope well with heat and survive the frosts. Both types spread very quickly and have no respect for other plants.
Cement borders are a good way of holding them in check.
The Centre has a very high evaporation rate. In summer the average monthly evaporation can be as high as 290 mm, and even in winter 100 mm is not uncommon.
Lawns are thirsty and water is not cheap. Far better to soak a grassed area twice a week in the cool of early evening when the water can really soak in, than to sprinkle it every day.
Some people decide that it is in their best interest to have only a small and easy-to-manage grassed area. For the rest of the garden they make effective use of pebbles and natural landscaping.
Trees that give shade and plants that grow edible fruits top the list of ‘what to plant’. It is, of course, most rewarding to grow vegetables, but they do demand constant and tender care; annuals are reserved for the keenest gardeners and those who don’t mind excess water bills!
Good shade trees include the very popular and fast-growing White Cedars. But they need heavy pruning each year and their leaves and berries can be quite a battle in autumn. Keep them well away from swimming pools unless you are prepared to prune before their leaves begin to fall.
Gums of many varieties give welcome shade and grow very quickly. Be careful not to place them too close to the house or any drainage system, and watch the power lines above.
Jacarandas must be one of the most beautiful of all deciduous flowering trees. They seem to have an almost ethereal beauty when outlined against a blue Centralian sky. However, keep these away from pools too.
Their leaves and flowers can play havoc with the filter. Silky Oaks need plenty of room, and Bottle Brushes, Acacias, Kurrajongs and Melaleucas are all reliable and hardy growers.
Oleanders take some beating, as do vines of Honey-suckle and Jasmine.
Top of the produce list must be citrus. Orange, lemon, mandarine and grapefruit are all excellent investments. Fig and mulberry are also worth some thought, as are the stone fruits generally. Remember that grape vines grow readily from cuttings.

Home grown vegetables are somewhat of a luxury and worth every effort. Roses deserve a special mention because they grow so well and brighten anybody’s day.

Your garden in Central Australia will respond best to regular soaking rather than constant sprinkling. Water late in the day or early in the morning for maximum benefit.

Trickle irrigation units are a great boon to the garden and your economy. These systems are readily available on the open market and are quite simple to set out.

Good health says: gardening can be fun. But don’t dig in the main heat of the day, and remember to drink plenty of fluids when working outside.

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**Skin Deep**

Skin is the largest organ of the human body. By keeping it clean we not only facilitate its purpose but do our bit to help prevent infections and rashes. Good health needs healthy skin!

The arid zone climate of Central Australia can be harsh on all skin types. Temperature extremes, lots of sunshine, and the usually dry atmosphere, can all play havoc with our skin if we aren’t careful.

Sweat or perspiration is a very personal airconditioner needed to maintain our normal body temperature. When we perspire, the moisture on the surface of our skin then evaporates to rid the body of excess heat. Sweating can result in a substantial loss of body fluid, particularly in summer and during vigorous exercise. This fluid needs to be replaced and you may even feel that salt tablets are sometimes required, but discuss this with your doctor.

Perspiration can accumulate and cause irritating skin reactions which are often more marked in those who wear synthetic fabrics. Cotton material is by far the most absorbent and least troublesome for skin. Whatever you wear, make sure your clothes are always rinsed quite free of all washing powders and laundry additives. In this part of the country, itches, excessive dryness and sunburn are the most common skin problems. You can help prevent these troubles occurring by keeping your skin clean and dry, using moisturizer regularly and adding a dash of baby oil to the bath water.

Feet and heels are particularly vulnerable in summer when stockings and socks are avoided as much as possible. A chiropody sponge is handy for the really rough spots; and if dry skin cream is rubbed into the feet every day, then they should remain fairly trouble-free. Wool fat, lanolene, or vaseline can all be used to soften heels, elbows and cracked lips or ears. People with blonde or reddish hair, blue eyes and pale skin colouring, tend to freckle and sunburn fast. Beware! Be especially careful with young children in this category and remember to keep re-applying sunburn cream when in the pool for extended periods. It is quite a good idea for youngsters to wear T-shirts when swimming in the heat of the day.

Any skin spots that persist for more than a few weeks, especially those that appear to have a rough scale about them, need a quick check with a doctor. The same goes for any obvious changes in moles. Over-all, you will find that sunscreen agents, sunglasses, hats and long-sleeved shirts are your skin’s best friends.

Some mothers leave the sunburn cream in the laundry for everyone to use as they go out the back door. In very young families the cream stays in mum’s handbag — ready for frequent use.

Make-up and hair care is largely personal preference. Certainly, hair care is similar in most climates but the enthusiastic Central Australian sun can be extra drying. It may also fade artificial hair colouring.

Remember the traditional ‘one hundred’ strokes with a hair brush each day? This helps distribute the natural oils to drying ends. Hair conditioners can also work wonders.
Mention should be made here about headlice. The problem is world-wide and Central Australia is no exception.
Schools arrange periodic checks for headlice, but if your child complains of an itchy scalp or seems to be scratching it a bit too often, then take a close look. The eggs of nits are small whitish specs that stick firmly to the hair strands. They are most commonly found behind the ears and on the back of your neck.
Chemists and local health centres stock suitable shampoos and lotions for treatment. You will need to follow the instructions very carefully, and a fine tooth comb will make the job easier.
Some people suggest a final hair rinse after treatment, using vinegar to loosen the eggs. Nits spread quickly, so the rest of the family or anyone else living in the house should also be checked out. Make sure pillow cases, towels, sheets, brushes and combs are not shared; and give them all a thorough washing.

It is very easy to catch headlice when many people come in close contact through work or play. It's no disgrace, but something that needs to be dealt with as soon as possible and without any fuss.

Make-up is another area of personal care. Some people find that they are happiest just using a light moisturizer, while others would feel 'all wrong' without their lipstick and mascara.

The important thing is to clean the face regularly and carefully, to apply moisturizers as a matter of habit, and to protect the skin from too much sunshine.

Itches are not quite so easily passed off. They can have many causes that include irritation from synthetic fibres, excessive sweating, bites and stings, a build-up of dirt and grime, and various fungal problems.

Prickly heat is caused by an accumulation of sweat. It produces an itchy and uncomfortable rash that tends to occur around the neck area, under armpits, in the groin, in front of elbows and behind the knees. Scratching only makes things worse and can readily lead to infection.

The best treatment is frequent cleansing and keeping the skin dry. Methyalted spirit brings temporary relief from the itch, and a light dusting of talcum powder will help keep the area dry for awhile. A little sunshine and fresh air won't hurt.

Bites and stings come mostly from mosquitoes. The thing to guard against is any scratching of the resulting lumps or bumps that can become infected very quickly and produce nasty little 'sores'.

Treat such sores with regular applications of an antiseptic cream. Cut and clean nails to prevent further trouble, and if any bites begin to throb or become red and tender then make an appointment to see your doctor as soon as possible.
Athletes Foot is a fungal infection which can flare up with little or no warning. It is important to prevent such rashes from becoming moist or soggy from excessive perspiration or infrequent washing. If you suffer from Athletes Foot wear thongs and sandals whenever possible, particularly in summer. Good health says: don’t laugh at skin care. Not only is skin the largest organ we have, but it holds our bodies together.

Winter Warmth

June and July are the coldest months, and even May and August can be nippy enough at night for heaters. At least one warm blanket will probably stay on your bed from April through to September, and it may well come as a surprise that the craze for continental quilts has also hit Alice Springs!

Electricity, oil and gas seem to provide the most popular heating methods, although kerosene units are also common, and there are still a few people unable to resist the magic of an open hearth.

Good health reminds us to check heaters very carefully when we unpack them for winter use. They will have been stored away for many months and need checking for safety as well as a quick clean. Electrical cords with frayed ends never pass a safety test!

Good health also demands careful consideration about where we place heaters. They should never be in a thoroughfare, near soft furnishings or in draughty areas. If young or elderly people live in your home then fire guards are a must.

It is well worth checking the labels on winter nightwear, especially for children. There is now a much wider range of non-inflammable material available in the shops. Some mums prefer toddlers to wear track suits over their pyjamas instead of dressing gowns that may more readily catch in a fire or heater.

A small fast-heating unit is not necessarily cheaper to run than a larger one left on low for a long period. It could well be quite the opposite!

Good health says: keep warm by all means, but enjoy as much winter sunshine as you can.

Friends and Foes

Wherever you live there are probably all sorts of friends and foes of the creeping and flying variety that existed long before you arrived. Flies for example, have to be accepted as part of the Australian scene. At times in the bush they are unbelievably thick. But fortunately this is not too often.

Perhaps those who suffer most with the fly problem, are toddlers and babes. Make it easier for them by creating an all-encompassing fly-net for their heads.
This can easily be done by gathering a strip of stiff gauze or netting and tying it securely at the top. The seam then needs to be joined, and elastic stitched around the base for the neck. Use dark green gauze to reduce glare.

There may even be others in the group who would appreciate this sort of protection. The nets are quick, cheap and easy to make, and certainly go a long way in preventing 'fly eye'. If any eyes do become infected, swollen or painful — seek medical advice.

On the home front, good health says: make sure that fly screens of the house are repaired and in good order. Do not have outside garbage bins by the back door, and make sure inside rubbish is emptied daily. Never leave uncovered food about or allow scraps to accumulate in 'hard to sweep places'. Fly sprays used too frequently can be toxic and expensive. Never use them in a room with uncovered food, and spray well away from faces.

There are times when mosquitoes can also be a problem. Remember they breed rapidly in dark or damp corners of the yard and in stagnant water.

Old tyres become marvellous breeding grounds. Polluted pools and unscreened septic tanks are also trouble spots. If for some reason you cannot remove water that has collected, add a little oil to the surface and the mosquitoes will soon die.

Remember that any cans or tins dumped in the yard or a trailer, can become thriving mosquito masses in about three weeks.

Most mosquito bites are just a nuisance. But if they are scratched, they may become infected and produce nasty sores that need a little disinfectant three or four times a day. If they become red and tender and begin to throb, then do not hesitate to see your doctor.

Unfortunately, mosquitoes spread heartworm in dogs, and heartworm is a fairly recent development in Central Australia. It will be most important to take your dog to the vet, and have him checked out so he can be cleared for anti-heartworm tablets. This clearance is necessary before the tablets can be given. There are several vets in Alice Springs who will soon set you right.

Ticks and fleas can also be a problem. There are times when dogs need ticks removed from them each day, and then weeks or months might go by without any trouble at all.

Ticks are parasites which thrive on blood. They bury deep in the animal's fur to get to the skin surface and the blood supply is just underneath it.

Sometimes they are so well hidden in the dog's coat, that only a systematic and regular search will be really effective in finding them. Be sure to check the dog's ears and between the pads of his feet.
Ticks can be removed by soaking cotton buds in methylated spirits or kerosene, and applying the solution to the head of the tick, which can then be removed with tweezers. Good health says: bath your dog regularly in tick wash and use flea powder whenever necessary.

Cockroaches and other crawlies are a nuisance at the best of times. Don’t encourage them by leaving food scraps about!

But even with all care taken, there are still times when they manage to persist. It is well worth having the home sprayed by a commercial firm every few years. This will also help keep the Redback spiders in check.

Redbacks are fairly common. They enjoy the shade of dark awnings, and breed well under timber, taps, brick and old ‘junk heaps’ in the yard.

The ‘red back’ might be red, orange or even a deceptive yellow-brown marking. Redback spider bites can be fatal — especially in children. Good health says: teach youngsters the dangers of all spiders. Show them particularly, what a Redback looks like, and spell out very clearly the risks involved. Teach your children to keep away from wood heaps, garden scrap, and other likely nesting areas.

The bite of a Redback spider may sting very little at first, but the pain can gradually become quite severe. If you think someone has been bitten by one, take the patient to the nearest hospital or doctor as quickly as possible for observation and treatment.

Itchy grubs had also better score a mention in this chapter. They are one of several varieties of hairy caterpillars. Very hairy! This particular brand has body hair that contains various irritants which affect human beings and may cause a very itchy rash. Even the pupa can cause trouble. Good health says: teach the kids to steer clear from hairy caterpillars.
Snakes should also receive comment. There are quite a few around, especially in the bush. The four most common snakes in Central Australia are the Death Adder, the Mulga or King Brown, the Western Brown, and a member of the Eastern Brown group. None of them are very friendly! Fortunately, there are few bites because people make sure they wear sensible shoes when bushwalking, keep away from hollow logs and watch where they put their feet. If someone is bitten, then it is important to take immediate action to minimise the possible effects of injected venom. Seek medical attention as quickly as possible. Remember that settlements, missions and stations all have a direct radio link with the Rural Health Service, and that medical evacuations can be arranged surprisingly quickly. The traditional “tourniquet” method of treating snakebite is no longer recommended as it causes great discomfort and is less effective than the new recommendations outlined below. Sometimes no venom is injected, even if the fangs have fully punctured the skin. Following snakebite, apply pressure over the bitten area and immobilise the limb. This reduces the movement of venom in the bloodstream.

**TREATMENT FOR SNAKEBITE**

1. Immediately apply a broad firm bandage around the limb to cover the bitten area. It should be as tight as one binding a strained ankle and should bind as much of the limb as possible.
   Crepe bandages are ideal, but any flexible material may be used — e.g. old towels or old clothing torn into strips.
2. Keep the limb as still as possible. Bind some type of splint to it, even if you have to use a shovel or a tyre lever. Some type of wooden splint is ideal.
3. It is important to take transport to the victim rather than try carrying the person to the transport.
4. Leave the bandages and splints in place until medical help is available.
   Remember not to cut the bitten area and do not wash the skin surface, for the residual venom may assist in identifying the snake.
   If it is possible to kill it safely, then do this and take it to hospital with the patient.
   Do not, of course, put yourself or others at risk in trying to kill the snake. It would obviously be more sensible to remember any markings and features for identification.
   Hopefully, this section will not give the impression that life is a constant battle against creeping, crawling and flying dangers. It pays well to think of these things ahead of time and to be prepared. You just never know!

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**Swimming Pool Safety**

Private swimming pools are very common in the Alice Springs region. Obviously the weather calls for such a fun, refreshing and handy way to cool off.

The advent of commercially sold above-ground pools for those who cannot afford in-ground pools, or who live in rented premises, has meant that many people now enjoy the convenience of backyard swimming. Before placing a pool in the garden, make sure you check first with the local Council and the Building Authority for the current regulations.

Some states are now very strict about fencing and child-proofing the area of large pools, but remember that drowning can also occur fairly readily in the popular little paddle pools which are so enjoyed by toddlers.

Good health says: help little ones enjoy water, and see that they learn to swim as soon as they are old enough.

Swimming lessons are usually incorporated in summer school programs and are available at the town Swimming Centre or through private instructors.

Don’t hesitate to make family rules about the use of backyard pools. These rules (just a few of them are needed), may well save your sanity as well as someone’s life.
Many people are not aware of the work involved in keeping swimming pools clean and healthy. Full maintenance of a backyard pool is not cheap. It is important to realise this before making the commitment to purchase anything larger than a paddle pool.

With so much sunshine in Central Australia you will find that pools usually need a larger dose of chlorine than is common in southern states. The strong sunlight also tends to encourage algae growth.

Good health says: maintain your pool at a high standard. No swimming for those with infections, and wear goggles to protect eyes if the chlorine becomes irritating. If you are having maintenance problems, do not hesitate to obtain professional advice from pool suppliers in town.

Of course not everyone has a swimming pool in the backyard and many people prefer to use the town’s beautifully landscaped Olympic pool complex.

The Swimming Centre really is a credit to Alice Springs. There are three pools, including a paddle-pool for toddlers, shaded areas, a canteen and shower facilities. It is always manned when open, and life guards are on duty during the busiest hours. Season tickets are available for families or individuals, and an active swimming club always welcomes new members.

Good health says: a few brisk lengths of the pool each morning make an excellent start to the day.

In summer anyway!
Foods and Fluids

Food handling and food storage in kitchens in Central Australia is much the same as in any other part of the country. The usual precautions for washing, storing and cooking are obviously required, with maybe a little more emphasis on the care needed in the defrosting of frozen foods. If you can think sufficiently ahead, aim to thaw out frozen foods in the refrigerator. If this is not possible, at least time the defrosting so that unfrozen food is not left lying about the kitchen to breed bacteria.

Never leave ham, pork, chicken or milk products on the bench to defrost first thing in the morning and then rush off to work all day. This can be particularly dangerous in summer. Good health says: remember that bacteria spread and thrive quickly in a non-refrigerated atmosphere. Food poisoning is certainly not pleasant!

Maybe the greatest danger facing food shoppers today is the vast selection of cheap quick-preparation convenience foods. Foods that tend to be high in starch, sugar and calories; and all too often, low in protein and vitamins.

Good food habits are formed at home. Save your kids from the temptation of a fridge full of inviting fattening fizzy drinks and have alternatives readily available.

Good health says: make it easy for your family to eat and drink sensibly. Good eating habits make for good health.

Remember that vitamin tablets are only needed by those who are unable to organize a well-balanced diet. Weight Watchers are very active in Alice Springs and always welcome new members.

Fluids play a particularly important role in the long summer months, especially during periods of active exercise such as gardening, bushwalking, playing sports or working outside in the shed or garage.

Dehydration can sneak up on anyone in these situations. Make a habit of carrying iced water in a polystyrene container for such times and remember that there might be occasions when salt tablets are in order.

Babies and young children, particularly, often need extra fluid in summer. Water or fruit juice is adequate if followed by normal feeds. When travelling on a hot day, though, you might well find that you also need extra fluid.

Some adults have a big thirst and in the Northern Territory alcohol is THE big quencher! Many people regard alcoholism as the major disease of Territorians. It’s not a bad idea to quench your thirst with water and use alcohol only as a social drink.

Wherever you live, Good health says: watch your alcohol intake especially before you drive. Breathalyser Units are used in the Northern Territory and dangerous driving is, indeed, a health hazard!
Health Help

Health services are provided by the Northern Territory Health Department, private practitioners and various individuals and groups. A new hospital opened in Alice Springs in 1978 to supply 228 beds. About 30 doctors and 200 nurses staff the wards which receive support from all the usual para medical people that hospitals need so they can function efficiently. There are three main operating theatres, a well-equipped casualty department, modern X-ray facilities and a physiotherapy unit. Outpatient sessions are held each day and visitors for inpatients are made to feel welcome.

Rural areas of The Centre are looked after by the Rural Health Section and Aerial Medical Workers of the Health Department. They co-operate with the Royal Flying Doctor Base to provide regular and emergency medical services for the Alice Springs District which covers the whole Alice Springs and Barkly Regions of the Northern Territory.

When specialist services outside the realm of the hospital network are required, appointments are made for visiting specialists or a trip for treatment in Adelaide may be subsidized. Several private medical practitioners operate in the Alice Springs town area and private dental services are also available. A dental clinic run by the Department functions in the Flynn Drive Community Health Centre. It also provides dental therapists who work regularly in most of the local schools.

The Community Health Centre offers all the usual infant health services from ante-natal classes and home baby visits, to child development assessment clinics, play groups for handicapped children, and hearing clinics. It also houses school medical staff who conduct annual routine checks and arrange follow-up appointments when necessary. Psychiatric outpatient clinics, immunisations, overseas vaccinations and family planning clinics are all part of the Health Centre Service.

Before you leave your home town ask your doctor if he would like to give you any X-rays, history notes or letters of referral. If you are going to live on a settlement or mission you will be glad to know that regular daily medical sessions are held with Aerial Medical doctors in town. Medical help is quickly despatched when needed, either by air or road ambulance. There are Rural Health doctors on call 24 hours a day.

Good health says: make sure you are familiar with the available medical services before any trouble arises. This can save a great deal of time and worry during an emergency and will help prevent unnecessary frustrations over routine health services.

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Personal Problem Areas

One of the ‘facts of life’ in Central Australia is its geographical isolation. More often than not this means that most of us are usually a long way from our extended families. Rarely are relatives nearby to share times of trouble, sickness or even celebration. The nuclear family in The Centre can be very nuclear indeed!
The sense of isolation can be eased considerably with a concerted effort to make a few really close friends. This is important for individuals, couples and families. Sharing mutual interests, loyalties or affections will create special caring relationships to help ease the pangs created by distance and separation.
We usually make friends quite readily with people of our own age and similar interests. But remember that someone always has to make the first move and to offer that first invitation. Many single people yearn for a touch of home atmosphere and will gladly become involved with a nearby family. The same also goes for older folk.
From a child’s point-of-view, few kids have permanent grandparents to take a day-to-day, or even an occasional but regular interest in their activities. An ‘adopted’ nanna or grandpa can bring a great sense of warmth, love and security on both sides. Young mums tied to the house may feel particularly vulnerable. They need to get out. They need to meet other mothers and become familiar with the various child-minding centres and play groups. It is also important to create a little time to pursue personal interests.
There are any number of clubs, groups and organisations in Alice Springs that always welcome new members. Service clubs and sporting bodies are another avenue, and of course, churches of the major denominations are all represented.

A Women’s Centre offers refuge and help. It runs courses, lectures, clinics and provides a meeting place for mums to get together. Those seeking marriage guidance can receive referral from there too.

So many folk are continually coming and going in Central Australia that it is wise to nurture old relationships while continually making new ones. Parting with friends is never very happy, but if the gap is readily bridged by others then life will be much easier. Professional isolation can become another personal problem area. It is not uncommon for the professional to be very largely ‘on his own’. Even if he has colleagues, specialisation may well result in quite separate interests and little support.

If this applies to your circumstances, then there may be need for an all-out effort to attend interstate seminars and conferences in your particular field, and to keep well up with current journals and publications.

Many jobs in The Centre require quite frequent stretches of time out bush. ‘Grass Widows’ are often the wives of geologists, wildlife researchers, rangers, support staff for settlements, doctors policemen and transport operators — to name just a few. These women need to make a special effort to fight loneliness and maybe even boredom. They need to use their skills, become involved in the community, and get out and about. Of course on the other end of the scale is the problem of letting too many obligations and commitments build up, this applies to all of us.

Good health says: there has to be a happy medium!

**Black and White**

Before coming to Alice Springs you will probably have read something of Aboriginals in Central Australia. It may well be that you have never had any direct or even indirect involvement with Aboriginal people before, but this will soon change.

You will meet them in the shops and the street. You will see them sitting in grassed areas and in dry sandy river beds. Some will be seen working — but many do not yet have jobs.

Your children will probably be with Aboriginal classmates at school. And if you happen to play football, soccer or hockey, they will be among the best players in your team.

In 1978 nearly one quarter of the Northern Territory population identified as Aboriginal.

About 20,000 were living in rural areas and 5,000 in urban areas.

Some people believe that the single most vital statistic regarding Aboriginals in Central Australia is that 54% of the 10,000 in this area in 1978 were under the age of nineteen.

Aborigines are no longer desert people or nomads. They have survived white settlement and are now trying to live in two worlds whilst fighting desperately to retain their racial identity.

Many Aboriginals live in rural areas, on various government settlements and in missions. A few still remain on pastoral properties.

In the 1970’s a significant number from the larger settlements (some have as many as 1,000 Aborigines on them), chose to move from the central settlement area.
They moved further out bush to live in more traditional and very much smaller family groups. This has become very significant and is known as the Homeland or Outstation Movement. Nearer town, there are still tribal Aborigines living on their Dreamtime land around the outskirts of Alice Springs.

These are mostly Aranda people on traditional Aranda land. Humpies and tents are still a common sight on the fringe-camps around town, but gradually increasing numbers of Aboriginal housing units are at last being built. Schooling in rural areas is restricted to primary levels, so many Aboriginal teenagers move into Yirara College in Alice Springs for their secondary schooling.

Yirara College is residential and designed especially for the bush Aboriginals. Once the students feel sufficiently confident in the college set-up, they are then helped to progress to one of the High Schools in town. Urban Aboriginals often begin schooling at pre-schools and move through the general system. Some go on to the special training courses at the Community College.

Increasing numbers of Aboriginal people are becoming involved in their own education programs as well as their own particular health and housing needs.

A local Aboriginal council helps deal with current housing plans, building construction, servicing and adaption to these new houses. This council is also active in co-ordinating the work of various departments. The Aboriginal Health Worker program is another strong and positive response in the new trend for Aboriginal self-determination programs. Many of the Health Workers have chosen to train in this field to help their own people and provide more personal health care.

If you are interested in knowing more of their culture and history there are several good courses held at the Alice Springs Community College, language classes run by The Institute for Aboriginal Development and many excellent books are available.

It seems a good idea to mention just two very easy-to-read books that you might like to look at before coming to The Centre.

The first one is PIONEERS AND SETTLERS — the Aboriginal Australians, by C. H. and R. M. Berndt. (Published by Pitman Australia 1978 and available in paperback). This little book is accurate, clear and gives an excellent overall comment on the development of Aboriginal Society.

It is widely used by High School students and is particularly recommended because it takes the reader right through to the circumstances of modern Aboriginal man. The second is really a picture book. Some would say it is for children. Others may comment that it offers the general public as much as any scientific report or academic work.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN’S HISTORY OF AUSTRALIA has been written and illustrated by our country’s young Aboriginals of today. It was published by Rigby. The pictures are a delight. The stories are deeply moving and utterly real. They are open, uncluttered and provide fascinating reading. Both these books could lead to excellent family discussion in preparation for your move to Central Australia.

Good health says: good health is not only the absence of disease, it is also man’s total well being in response to his total environment.