

taylor root
SPECIALIST SEARCH & RECRUITMENT

Living and Working
in Australia for
South African
Lawyers



Introduction

Australia is a well-trodden path for South Africans who are looking for an international experience that combines a new adventure with excellent career opportunities. Similar legal systems, a low barrier to entry for visas and a large and successful economy make Australia a natural destination for work.

Taylor Root is a market leading, global specialist search business, with an extensive network of legal, compliance & risk professionals. For over thirty years we have been connecting candidates with the world's leading businesses and law firms.

Our international offering combines our deep local market expertise with an exceptional global network of Consultants, who understand the process and challenges of an international career move.

This guide is designed to help Lawyers from South Africa who are planning to relocate to the Australia, either temporarily or for the long-term, to navigate the advantages, challenges and steps that they will encounter on that journey.



The Australian legal market can offer exceptional career opportunities and benefits for talented South African lawyers.

Why Australia

Australia is famous around the world for stunning beaches, iconic landmarks and a sunny climate, drawing in visitors and professionals from across the world.

Aside from the excitement of venturing to a new country and the fantastic travel opportunities that it entails, the Australian market can offer exceptional career benefits for talented lawyers.

With many similarities between the Australian and South African legal systems and increasingly high demand for talented Lawyers, Australian firms regularly pursue international as well as domestic candidates.

Australia boasts one of the largest economies in the Southern Hemisphere, with a legal market that reflects its powerful financial services, construction, tourism and natural resources industries. Private practice firms in the key regional hubs, such as Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth can offer world class training & development and access to complex and engaging legal work. Australian firms have also seen notable growth in fee earner salaries in recent years.



Australian Legal Market

Like the South African market, Australia's legal landscape is comprised of a diverse range of firms, including global full-service legal brands and top-tier Australian practices, mid-tier and national practices and a host of boutique specialists, servicing all layers of the economy.

Although Australia's geography spans thousands of square miles, the bulk of legal work takes place within many of the country's state capitals, principle among them are Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth, which tend to be popular with international lawyers.

Each of these markets can offer opportunities to lawyers, across the majority of practice areas but the strength of local economies will play a role in determining which markets are best for which type of work.

As Australia's largest financial centre, Sydney naturally presents an excellent opportunity for corporate and financial services specialists, who are often in high demand across Melbourne also. Brisbane and Perth, with their energy and natural resources production and export, can offer energy and projects specialists a wide range of opportunities.

However, even with regional factors considered, areas such as construction, real estate, dispute resolution, corporate, commercial and banking remain under-resourced across the country.

The past decade has seen a number of Australian firms cement their position as leaders within the market, through expansion and mergers with international firms, such as Linklaters' merger with Allens, Ashurst's acquisition of Blake Dawson and Mallesons Stephen Jaques with King & Wood.

The resultant investment and increases in scale through global networks has seen a period of exceptional growth in the market, further buoyed by the arrival of many UK and US head-quartered firms also.

As many firms consolidate and bolster their positions, a number of boutiques have either grown or established themselves as a specialist and more cost-effective alternative to their larger competitors.

The knock-on effect for aspiring international lawyers, is an abundance of opportunity, where firms seek to gain competitive advantage through diverse talent pools such as lawyers from South Africa and further afield.

Straightforward visa arrangements, a favourable cross-qualification process, similar client bases and natural cultural affinities, mean that Australian law firms and many in house teams are keen to see candidates from South Africa.

— ” —
Australia's legal landscape is comprised of a diverse range of firms,
including global full-service legal brands and top-tier Australian
practices, mid-tier and national practices

— “ —



What Employers Want

The private practice market in Australia faces many of the same shortages and strengths as other developed legal markets and economies.

Talented transactional lawyers in banking, corporate, commercial, real estate, energy and projects will always have options. For litigation specialists or practitioners with niche skillsets such as data privacy, there are a range of boutique, international and top tier firms who will consider candidates that bring experience and commercial acumen to the table.

A booming economy, complex and evolving regulatory landscape and constant innovations in digital solutions means that legal teams are increasingly looking to grow their Associate bases and succession pipeline, through lateral hires. South Africans who are considering an international move, will benefit from high demand in the market and a range of options.

Candidates who can show a strong academic track record, a passion for working with clients and supporting business development efforts, particularly from South Africa's "Big Five" Law firms are considered highly attractive to hiring firms. Candidates who are currently working for smaller, regional practices that may hold less of a high-profile reputation internationally, may wish to consider seeking a domestic move prior to relocating, to secure the experience and reputation that lends itself to an overseas assignment.

Candidates who are considering moving to an in-house legal team can find themselves in high demand, especially those with general corporate/commercial, construction, technology or real estate experience. Depending on the sector, roles can vary from broad in house Counsel remits, through to specialist and focused roles that may be industry specific. Typically lawyers with more than 3 years of post-admission experience are in the highest demand.



Approaching the Market

The Australian legal market is larger than South Africa's market, in terms of the number of firms hiring and variety of work on offer.

Many firms will welcome applications from foreign qualified lawyers, but competition is high and navigating the market to ensure that the firms that you apply to and interview with can be challenging to manage alongside a full-time job.

By working with Taylor Root, you can maximise your chances of securing the right role. Our extensive network across Australia, including our exceptionally networked teams, based in Melbourne and Sydney have decades of experience and relationships across the national market.

With dedicated points of contact in Australia coordinating your relocation, with Consultants who have experience in making an international move, you will receive tailored advice and preparation for each application and interview, having been represented by Consultants who understand your motivations, strengths and key selling points.



The Australian Economy

The economy of Australia is a highly developed market economy. Australia's GDP was estimated at A\$1.89 trillion as of 2019, with a per capita GDP higher than that of the New Zealand, UK, Canada and Germany in terms of purchasing power parity.

The Australian economy continues to grow and has grown at an average annual rate of 3.6% for over 15 years, well above the OECD average of 2.5%. There has been a continued surge in the mining, resources and construction industries, with mining and resources contributing more than half of total GDP.

International companies have also chosen to call Australia home, with the country presenting the best business case for regional headquarters to target the dynamic Asia-Pacific region.

Along with all of this, Australia has the added benefit of open markets and free trade agreements in place with many countries, such as China and the USA. This has meant lower input costs and increased productivity and efficiency.

Australia's strong economic growth has been coupled with low inflation. For over a decade the inflation rate has been stable, at an average of 2.5% over the period. The unemployment rate in Australia has fallen substantially from almost 11% in 1992 to approximately 5.3% per cent in December 2019.

There's no wonder Australia is a popular choice for lawyers to cash in on the thriving economic conditions.



Remuneration & Benefits

Across the country, a shortage of lawyers, particularly within the corporate, banking and construction practice areas has been the major source of frustration for law firms. From a salary perspective, lawyers in Australia have generally seen their salaries impacted by three main factors over the past 12 to 18 months.

The first is the impact of the US law firms entering Australia. Firms such as Jones Day, and more recently White & Case, have brought with them an increased salary banding for their Associates. Whilst the offices of US firms in Australia do not pay on the Cravath scale, salaries within their Australian offices are commonly the highest within the country. This is starting to have a flow on effect to the traditional top-tier Australian firms, as they seek to retain their own lawyers, but to also attract talent to their offices across the country.

Second, lawyers have been fortunate to have multiple options to choose from when considering their options. The vast majority of recruitment within law firms is taking place around 3 to 6 years' PQE. That's not surprising, given this is usually when a lawyer is getting to the Senior Associate mark, and deciding which way they should take their career. Of course, in-house positions are also increasingly available at this level of experience – a factor that commonly impacts on retention levels for law firms.

What this has meant is that law firms are trying new ways to attract, retain and reward quality lawyers. We have seen more examples of law firms of all sizes adopting agile and flexible working practices. Flexible working in Australia has historically been seen as the domain of experienced lawyers with parenting responsibilities, but this is no longer the case. Junior lawyers, both male and female, are increasingly able to work from home or work more flexibly around their extra-curricular commitments at the encouragement of their supervising partners. In some firms, they are also encouraging their staff to dress-down throughout the week.

Salaries - Mid Tier Firms

Base Range AU\$

	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane	Perth
1PQE	\$75,000 - \$95,000	\$78,000 - \$85,000	\$70,000 - \$88,000	\$65,000 - \$85,000
2PQE	\$85,000 - \$110,000	\$85,000 - \$100,000	\$81,000 - \$95,000	\$75,000 - \$90,000
3PQE	\$97,500 - \$120,000	\$90,000 - \$115,000	\$93,000 - \$113,000	\$85,000 - \$100,000
4 PQE	\$115,000 - \$140,000	\$96,000 - \$122,000	\$102,000 - \$136,000	\$90,000 - \$117,000
5 PQE	\$127,500 - \$155,000	\$110,000 - \$145,000	\$128,000 - \$157,000	\$115,000 - \$143,000
6 PQE	\$139,500 - \$170,000	\$132,000 - \$161,000	\$133,000 - \$168,000	\$123,000 - \$156,000
7 PQE	\$150,000 - \$180,000	\$150,000 - \$175,000	\$142,000 - \$174,000	\$130,000 - \$170,000
8 PQE	\$170,000 - \$205,000	\$168,000 - \$197,000	\$165,000 - \$195,000	\$143,000 - \$196,000
Counsel	\$210,000 +	\$210,000 +	\$200,000 +	\$200,000 +

All salaries are inclusive of superannuation, excluding bonus.

Salaries - Top Tier Firms

Base Range AU\$

	Sydney	Melbourne	Brisbane	Perth
1PQE	\$90,000 - \$105,000	\$82,000 - \$100,000	\$80,000 - \$88,000	\$75,000 - \$95,000
2PQE	\$96,000 - \$129,000	\$92,000 - \$120,000	\$87,000 - \$100,000	\$85,000 - \$100,000
3PQE	\$114,000 - \$135,000	\$96,000 - \$125,000	\$93,500 - \$114,000	\$95,000 - \$110,000
4 PQE	\$130,000 - \$154,000	\$121,000 - \$140,000	\$112,000 - \$145,000	\$100,000 - \$130,000
5 PQE	\$144,000 - \$175,000	\$130,000 - \$170,000	\$138,000 - \$165,000	\$125,000 - \$153,000
6 PQE	\$166,000 - \$230,000	\$155,000 - \$205,000	\$143,000 - \$175,000	\$135,000 - \$165,000
7 PQE	\$175,500 - \$236,000	\$166,000 - \$210,000	\$152,000 - \$185,000	\$145,000 - \$180,000
8 PQE	\$180,000 - \$255,000	\$195,000 - \$230,000	\$175,000 - \$210,000	\$158,000 - \$205,000
Counsel	\$240,000 +	\$235,000 +	\$215,000 +	\$210,000 +

All salaries are inclusive of superannuation, excluding bonus.



Major Cities in Australia

In terms of the general population, as well as the size of the respective legal communities, there is little difference between the two (Sydney and Melbourne both have a population of circa 5 million). It's no shock then that the largest legal markets are in Sydney and Melbourne. Salaries tend to be slightly higher in Sydney and Perth, by around 5%-10%, but the cost of living is also higher than in other capital cities by approximately 10%.

The other main locations are Brisbane and Perth, which have seen significant population and economic growth in recent times off the back of the resources boom. The growth of these cities has resulted in a number of firms being prepared to look abroad for legal talent, which has provided opportunities for lawyers from locations such as South Africa, New Zealand and the UK to take their place. Energy, corporate, project finance and construction lawyers are commonly in demand in these most of these cities.

There is less demand in Adelaide, Darwin and Canberra, with Canberra being more focused on Government based legal work.

Each city has its own personality and strengths. While Sydney is a traditional favourite with international lawyers, the other cities each offer a truly unique and exciting experience.



Sydney

Sydney is Australia's largest city and there's no denying it's a natural stunner! Its dazzling harbour and white sand city beaches make it a truly unique city that offers an enviable lifestyle and some of the highest quality work in the country.

Sydney is one of the busiest commercial hubs in the Asia-Pacific region and it is the financial services centre of Australia, with a cosmopolitan population, lush parks, bars and restaurants. The city has a prime location with its famous attractions, the Sydney Opera House and the Sydney Harbour Bridge, located on a spectacular harbour.

Sydney has a strong cultural scene. There is an abundance of galleries and music venues dotted around picturesque bays and parks. A popular weekend trip to take is to the Blue Mountains (2 hrs west of the city). Boasting a lush forest setting amidst rolling valleys and mountains, it is a great retreat from the city. Another popular trip is to the wineries of the Hunter Valley (3hrs north of the city).

Sydney-siders are big sports fans. With various sporting venues such as the Sydney Cricket Ground, ANZ stadium and the stadiums at Sydney Olympic Park, they follow a variety of sporting codes with the most popular being Cricket, Rugby League, Rugby Union and Australian Rules Football.

Summers in Sydney are warm and winters very mild (averaging 26 degrees in summer and 17 degrees in winter). It is a city where people enjoy an active and outdoor lifestyle year round, a city where many people go surfing before they catch a ferry to work across what many call the most beautiful harbour in the world. It is no wonder that Sydney consistently ranks as one of the top 10 places in the world to work and to live.





Melbourne

Australia's mecca of all things trendy and tasty, Melbourne is the cosmopolitan Australian city that many fall in love with. It balances its character as the sporting capital of Australia with its blend of style, arts culture, fashion and some of the best dining experiences in Australia.

Melbourne is a blend of bustling laneways, fashion, arts, culture, world-class restaurants and captivating museums. The locals love their coffee, and serve it up in abundance at cosy cafés. There's always a sense of excitement here – whether its in the city's fascinating flavours or fierce sporting rivalries. Attend a sports event, drink a cocktail on a rooftop and uncover the stories hidden within Melbourne's art-filled alleyways.

As Australia's 2nd largest city, it has all the benefits of a large city although the stand-out factor is its liveability – it's consistently rated as the most liveable city in the world and has won the top prize on multiple occasions.



Brisbane

Brisbane is the bustling heart of Queensland, home to more than 2 million people. It is a city that combines a famous laid back lifestyle with all the sights, sounds and energy of a major metropolis. Brisbane's weather, river-front setting and unrivalled employment growth make it one of the most attractive cities to live in from almost any angle.

Being a little smaller than Sydney and Melbourne, it is often the city of choice for people who might be looking to settle in Australia and potentially start a family. It is also popular with people who are fans of the outdoors. And why, not? With Surfers Paradise only an hour away by car, it's a great place to base yourself (and your surfboard).

Brisbane is a diverse and thriving city with a perfect climate year round (29 degrees in summer, 21 degrees in winter) with Australia's famous Gold Coast and hinterland less than 1 hours drive away. Brisbane has a sophisticated restaurant and cafe scene as well as excellent night life.



Perth

Embrace the best of both worlds in Perth, where soft-sand beaches and scenic parks meet a thriving metropolis of small bars, creative restaurants and curated street art.

Situated in Australia's largest state Western Australia, Perth offers a true beach lifestyle.

Perth has had tremendous growth in recent years off the back of the mining and resources boom, it is the capital of the richest state in Australia and home to some of the wealthiest individuals in the country. As a result, Perth has developed as a sophisticated legal market, and is home to more US and UK law firms than Sydney.

Perth's pristine natural environment can be enjoyed year round with perfect weather. Together with the beaches, the city is surrounded by excellent wineries and alfresco dining.



Canberra

Of all the state capital cities in Australia, Canberra is perhaps the most unique. The home of Australia's federal government owes its history to a compromise between state governments and is one of the few major cities not located within 50km of the coast.

You'll find a mix of political icons, history, art and the outdoors in Australia's capital city.

Canberra might be smaller than Sydney to its north and Melbourne to its south, but there's still plenty to discover. The small town vibe means it's easy to get around and the locals are eager to share the best of their food, wine, beer and attractions.

Within the city limits you'll find museums, galleries, breweries and modern architecture, but just minutes away lies the quiet nature of mountains, valleys and everything in between. It's no wonder the locals here love the lifestyle and landscape.



Holidays

Generally, Australians are offered four weeks paid leave each year. Many people choose to take time off over the Christmas break and enjoy a summer holiday.

The National Public Holidays are New Year's Day, Australia Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday, ANZAC Day, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.

All other public holidays such as Queen's Birthday and Labour Day are individually declared by the state and territory governments.

- New Year's Day - 1 January
- Australia Day - 26 January
- Labour Day
- Good Friday
- Easter Saturday
- Easter Sunday
- Easter Monday
- ANZAC Day - 25 April
- Queen's Birthday
- Christmas Day - 25 Dec
- Boxing Day - 26 Dec

*If you're in Melbourne, you may also be given a public holiday for the AFL Grand Final and the Melbourne Cup.



In Sydney, you may choose to catch one of the many ferries across the harbour, or utilise the extensive train, bus and light rail network .



Getting Around

Australia is a big country, but despite its size, it's easy to get around? Domestically Australia has an easy to use plane, train and bus system, and getting from Sydney to Melbourne is a short 1 hour flight.

Depending on what city you are in, the daily commute into work can vary. In Sydney, you may choose to catch one of the many ferries across the harbour, or utilise the extensive train, bus and light rail network across the city. In Melbourne, you could hop on one of the iconic trams. In Perth and Brisbane, why not make the most of the sun and cycle or walk to work?

Check the driver licence regulations.

Your South African drivers licence is valid for 6 months in Australia. After 6 months, you need to obtain an Australian drivers licence. Each Australian state has its own driving and licensing laws, so the process depends on where you live.

NSW - rta.nsw.gov.au
 VIC - vicroads.vic.gov.au
 QLD - transport.qld.gov.au
 SA - sa.gov.au
 ACT - rego.act.gov.au

Accommodation

Like South Africa there are positives and negatives to each city and each suburb and it is important to do research before you leave South Africa, especially before you make any fixed arrangements.

In Sydney, the trendy inner west areas of Newtown and Surry Hills offer a quick commute in to work while offering a laid-back lifestyle, and the suburbs of Bondi, Coogee and Manly offer the beach lifestyles. If you are in Melbourne, suburbs such as South Yarra, Richmond and St Kilda are popular choices. Inner city Subiaco and beachside suburbs like Cottesloe and Scarborough offer a great lifestyle in Perth, whereas the trendy suburbs in Highgate Hill, Newstead, Bulimba and Balmoral in Brisbane prove good destinations.

Some helpful Australian property websites include:

- domain.com.au
- realestate.com.au
- realestateview.com.au



Median weekly rent for a one bedroom apartment (A\$)

Cost of Living

Australia is an incredible place to live and offers many opportunities, however Australia currently has the 10th highest cost of living in the world, with New Zealand, the USA and UK close behind at 14, 15th and 16th place respectively.

Australia's most expensive city, Sydney sits at 46 on the Cost of living index, with Perth at 102nd, Brisbane at 106th, Melbourne at 116th and Auckland at 76th.

Note: Costs based on Sydney and Melbourne prices.

Basic Lunch including beverage	\$16
Dinner in a restaurant including beverage	\$50
Pint of Beer	\$8
Cup of Barista Coffee	\$6
Monthly ticket public transport	\$140
One month of gym membership	\$120
Unlimited Broadband Internet /mth	\$80





Visas & Immigration

VISA REQUIREMENTS

When you enter Australia on your South African passport, you will need a Visa with work rights, Permanent Residency, or Citizenship to be allowed to work.

There are various visa options available for overseas applicants, depending on your circumstances. If you are seeking employer sponsorship, you will need the Temporary Skill Shortage Visa (subclass 482). This visa will allow you to live and work in Australia for a period of up to 4 years. After that period, you can apply for residency and thereafter citizenship (see below).

Most of the major law firms in Australia have a priority agreement in place with the Australian Department of Immigration that allows them to sponsor lawyers and obtain visas for them. If you are offered a role with one of them, they will apply for a visa on your behalf and cover the costs of the application.

For more details visit > <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/visas/getting-a-visa/visa-listing/temporary-skill-shortage-482>

BECOMING AN AUSTRALIAN PERMANENT RESIDENT OR CITIZEN

If you are intending to live in Australia permanently, then it might be a very good idea to consider becoming an Australian citizen. This will require you to become an Australian permanent resident first (and yes, you can become an Australian citizen without losing your status as a South African citizen).

Once you've been a permanent resident for 12 months or more, you can apply for Australian citizenship.



Tax

While you're working in Australia, it's important to understand tax considerations that could apply to you and your income.

In South Africa you are issued with South African Tax Identification number, which is only issued by the South African Revenue Service (SARS). The Australian equivalent is a Tax File Number (TFN) from the Australian Taxation Office. You can apply for a Tax File Number online on the Australian Taxation Office website - <https://www.ato.gov.au/>.

Australians have enjoyed a series of tax cuts over the past few years, through a combination of both tax rate cuts and changes to thresholds for higher tax rates.

The current individual tax rates for the 2020-21 Australian financial year ending 30 June, 2021.

Taxable Income	Tax on this income
0 - \$18,200	Nil
\$18,201 - \$45,000	19c for each \$1 over \$18,200
\$45,001 - \$120,000	\$5,092 plus 32.5 cents for each \$1 over \$45,000
\$120,001 - \$180,000	\$29,467 plus 37 cents for each \$1 over \$120,000
\$180,001 and over	\$51,667 plus 45 cents for each \$1 over \$180,000

The above rates do not include the Medicare levy of 2%



Banking

Moving countries and moving banks is always a big step. And while the Australian banking system is one of the safest and most stable around, there may be a few differences from your country's banking system.

You can open an account online up to three months before you move, then transfer money across so it's waiting when you get here. You can also open an account online after you arrive or by visiting a local branch.

Whichever option you choose, you'll need to bring some documents to the branch when you first visit, to formally prove your identity. We recommend you bring along original copies.

- Current passport (original document required)



Qualification

If you are a qualified South African lawyer and have a current practising certificate, you don't need to re-qualify into Australia to practice as a lawyer.

Most law firms across Australia employ South African Lawyers as "overseas qualified consultants". The Law Societies of each State and Territory govern their own requirements for admission to practice. As a result, the precise rules concerning foreign lawyers' admission will vary from location to location.

Typically, however, UK lawyers will be required to sit exams in the areas of Australian Constitutional Law, Trust Accounts and Professional Conduct.

Firms will allow you time off/study leave and provide all the assistance required to pass the exams.



Health Care

Australia has both public and private health care systems. The public health services in Australia are provided by Medicare Australia, an Australian Government agency.

Medicare will not cover all healthcare costs. Rather, benefits are based on a schedule of fees, and you are required to cover the gap between the schedule and the cost the practitioner charges for the service. Medicare won't cover extra services such as dental and physiotherapy or medical aids like glasses.

Many Australians supplement their Medicare cover with private health insurance, and this is encouraged by the Australian Government through the tax system. Some firms will recommend private health insurance providers as part of your benefits package.



Superannuation

Superannuation (commonly called "super") is a form of compulsory savings which a person may only access when retiring from the workforce and subject to other restrictions, such as age.

Employers in Australia are required to make super contributions for their employees at the applicable superannuation rate.

Currently, the applicable rate of superannuation is 10% of an employee's ordinary income. You will typically have the right to choose which super fund or retirement savings account your contributions will go into, with your employer having a list of recommended choices already at hand for you to choose from.

Should you decide to return to South Africa, it is possible to transfer your superannuation accrued back into South Africa.

taylor root

SPECIALIST SEARCH & RECRUITMENT

London
T: +44 20 7415 2828

Birmingham
T: +44 121 809 6910

Dublin
T: +35 315 682 835

Amsterdam
T: +31 20 888 6210

Düsseldorf
T: +49 21 124 7911 10

Frankfurt
T: +49 69 363 9632 10

Milan
T: +39 02 8295 1710

Dubai
T: +9714 448 7770

Hong Kong
T: +852 3008 9000

Singapore
T: +65 6420 0500

Sydney
T: +61 2 9236 9000


Melbourne
T: +61 3 8610 8400

New York
T: +1 212 682 4882

Taylor Root is part of the SR Group

sr group
SPECIALIST SEARCH & RECRUITMENT

brewer morris | **carter murray** | **frazier jones** | **taylor root**

 taylorroot.com.au

 [@TaylorRootLegal](https://twitter.com/TaylorRootLegal)

 [/company/taylor-root](https://www.linkedin.com/company/taylor-root)