

Australia sets up bushfire information platform for tourists



Holidaymakers in Australia are being advised to check on a government website in what way their trip may be impacted by the country's raging wildfires.

The Australian Tourism Board website shows precisely which areas of the country are affected by the fires, which have killed three people and destroyed more than 1.25mil ha of land in Victoria.

The overview of affected areas on the website (australia.com/en/travel-alerts) also provides links to regional pages of Australian authorities, while the New South Wales government website is mapping the state's ongoing fires at rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information.

The bushfires are mainly raging in New South Wales, in the Blue Mountains and on the South Coast. Sydney and Canberra are also affected by smoke, with residents regularly being advised to remain indoors.

Australia's bushfire-ravaged state of Victoria in the country's south-east has extended its "state of disaster" as fires show little sign of abating.

Authorities said 40 fires were burning across the state on Jan 9, covering much of the state's east. The declaration, which was a first for Australia's second-most populous state, gives state authorities and emergency services additional powers to mobilise resources and evacuate people.

Two people have meanwhile died and an estimated 25,000 koalas have been killed in fires on Kangaroo Island, a popular tourist destination.

In worst-hit New South Wales, officials said almost 1,900 homes had been destroyed this fire season.

Australia has just experienced the warmest and driest year on record in 2019, according to the national weather bureau, which comes before a backdrop of millions of hectares of land razed by ferocious bushfires.

“(The year) 2019 was Australia’s warmest year on record, with a national mean temperature 1.52°C above average, surpassing the previous record of 1.33°C above average in 2013, ” the Bureau of Meteorology said in its annual climate statement recently. – **dpa, January 22, 2020**