

# Oxford Australia Word of the Month

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**grey nomad** *n. Aust. colloq.* retired person who travels extensively, esp. by campervan etc.

*Australian Pocket Oxford Dictionary, Sixth Edition*

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# Grey nomad

## The story behind the Word of the Month

On 4 January 2001 an article in the *Australian* newspaper examined the phenomenon of the **grey nomad**:

Older travellers, far from being over the hill, are much more likely to be up it—climbing, caving, trekking or skiing, putting many a youngster to shame. The tourism industry has coined the phrase **Grey Nomads** to describe seniors and it's widely acknowledged that these (mostly) retired travellers form an important segment of the market. With money to spare (many appear to delight in spending their children's inheritance—good on them, I say) and time to dwell and discover, the senior traveller is unhurried, thorough and frequently ready for risks.

A **grey nomad** is a retired person who travels extensively within Australia, especially by campervan, caravan, or motor home. Grey nomads generally travel with no particular schedule or date to return to their normal place of residence. They are all members of the baby boomer generation.

We are not sure how long the term has been around, but our first printed evidence occurs in 1995. The Web evidence for the term is overwhelmingly Australian, so we are claiming it as an Australianism.

As indicated in the quotation above, grey nomads often appear to take great pride in making the point that they are not going to pass on all their money to their kids—they are going to spend it and they are going to enjoy life. In order to express this a new acronym was invented—**SKIN**, standing for 'spending the kids inheritance now'. The grey nomads proudly display this on stickers on their

caravans and campervans.

But are things changing? A report in the *Sydney Morning Herald* newspaper on 24 February 2007 points out that soaring house prices right across Australia are threatening to prevent many aspirational middle-classes from buying into the Great Australian Dream. The children and grandchildren of the grey nomads may well be left house-less if the inheritance is squandered by the awful fact of the grey nomads enjoying themselves:

It seems only yesterday the grey nomads were sporting a cheeky bumper sticker on their four-wheel-drives and campervans: **SKIN**—Spending the Kids' Inheritance Now—it read. The sentiment heralded a new hedonistic approach to ageing. No more self-sacrifice or frugality. The new aged were intending to grow old disgracefully. Whether this meant skiing in Aspen, or circumnavigating Australia, the emphasis was on spend, not save. And the kids? Well, after the education and money lavished on them in their growing-up years, they would have to stand on their own two feet. Now the climate has changed. Baby boomer parents, hitting the retirement years, regard their adult children's future with alarm. The children will never be able to buy a house unless the parents pitch in ... The talk again is of self-sacrifice and self-denial. The last boat to the middle class is pulling out and their kids will not be on it.

But it is surely too early to prophesy the demise of the **grey nomad** phenomenon. And as long as that remains the case, the term **grey nomad** will continue to have a necessary place in the Australian vernacular.

metrosexual  
weapon  
of mass  
destruction  
karrack  
glycaemic  
burka  
index  
barbecue stopper  
senior moment  
Sudoku  
hornbag  
dishlicker  
witlof  
cyberstalking  
Naltrexone  
pear-shaped  
Bioterrorism  
yakitori