



**RENTING A HOME FOR THE FIRST  
TIME IN CANBERRA?  
HERE IS YOUR COMPLETE GUIDE**

**-JACK SMITH**

# ABSTRACT

You've finally decided to move out of the family home and rent a house. There is lots of fun to be had in being a first time renter but it pays to be organised and have a good understanding of the market.

Hunting for the perfect rental is the fun part, but once you find the property, things start to get serious and you will have to be organised if you want to beat other potential tenants and impress the landlord.

Here, we've compiled the ultimate first-time renters cheat sheet that will tell you what you need to know before you sign on the dotted line.

## LIFESTYLE IN CANBERRA

**Enjoy the lifestyle you've been waiting for.**

Canberra is one of Australia's best-kept secrets. Much more than just Australia's capital, we're welcoming to students, businesses, professionals and families. A progressive, vibrant and beautiful place to live.

It's Canberra's contrasts that make it such a great place to call home. While we are known as the seat of government, we are far from a formal city. We have an easy lifestyle and a strong community vibe. And it's a beautiful place to explore.

Not only are we Australia's most physically active population, we're also right up there on other measures of well-being. Canberra has the following:

- highest average income
- highest level of education
- strongest jobs growth
- lowest unemployment.

This is one of the safest cities in the world, with very low crime rates.

## **Welcoming and multicultural**

We welcome people from across Australia and all around the world. More than 26% of Canberrans are from overseas. One in four speaks a language other than English.

This is a city where everyone belongs and can participate. More than 90% agree it's good for society to have different cultures. We're the only Australian state or territory to be a refugee welcome zone. We're part of the Welcoming Cities Network.

But we don't just welcome people from other cultures — we celebrate with them. Canberrans enjoy the sights, sounds and tastes of our multicultural city. The National Multicultural Festival is an annual highlight. And our beautiful embassies and high commissions are part of what makes this such an interesting place to live.

## **Australia's leading destination for culture and ideas**

Canberra brims with culture and art. We host some of the country's top cultural attractions. This includes Australia's National Gallery and National Museum, and many more. The local art scene is full and rich too. It's bustling with artists, actors, musicians and writers. They work beside our thought leaders, academics and creatives.

A new generation of Canberrans drives new precincts across the city. NewActon's award-winning modern buildings sit beside heritage-listed splendour. There's a wildlife lodge at the National Zoo and Aquarium. You can stay overnight with the animals right outside your room.

Restaurants, cafes, bars, wineries and breweries serve produce from Canberra and the region. Our food and wine industries compete with the best in the world.

Canberra's Design Festival celebrates the fact that design, creativity and originality are at our city's core. That's evident from our very beginnings. This is a designed and hand-picked capital city.

## Great community feel

Canberra is a great place to raise a family. Our city offers accessible outdoor and natural spaces, a safe environment and an outstanding education system. Canberra gives you back time to do the things you choose. Because you don't spend hours in traffic, you gain time to be with those you love most. Work life balance is the real deal here.

We're the most physically active community in Australia. Sport and recreational activities are a highly prized part of our lifestyle. Our extensive network of cycleways and footpaths make getting outdoors enjoyable and safe. We're keen supporters of our elite sporting teams too. The Canberra Raiders, Brumbies, UC Capitals and others enjoy loyal and enthusiastic Canberra supporters.

We also know the value of giving. We have the highest rate of volunteering in the country. Many of us willingly offer our time and skills to benefit others. We volunteer with sporting clubs, at community events, in schools and for charities. We understand that it takes many to build and maintain healthy and resilient individuals, communities and natural environments.

## Progressive and diverse

**We're proudly progressive. Canberra was the:**

- first jurisdiction in Australia to legislate marriage equality
- first jurisdiction in Australia to celebrate our First Nations culture and community with a Reconciliation Day public holiday
- first mainland state or territory to achieve 100% renewable energy

This city embraces innovation. Some of the most future-thinking companies in the world, from Google to Seeing Machines, choose Canberra as a test bed for new technology.

The Canberra Innovation Network nurtures our entrepreneurial and business-minded community. It helps launch clever and creative businesses that build on Canberra's excellence in research and innovation.

## **Close to everything**

Everyday living is easy. All you need for a comfortable life is within easy reach. You're only ever 30 minutes' drive from the city and each of the suburban town centres is bustling with cafes, shops and services.

We're lucky to be just a short drive from stunning coastlines, world-class ski-fields and big-city bustle when an escape is needed. Living in Canberra gives you easy access to:

- The picturesque Brindabella mountains to our west.
- Sydney, an easy three-hour drive to our north.
- World-class ski-fields to our south.
- Stunning coastline two hours east.
- See yourself in Canberra

We are a young city with big plans. We're progressive, prosperous and deeply interested in the world around us. But accessible enough for you to find a place here.

Imagine yourself in a city where things are just easier. Where there's always plenty to do, and the time to enjoy it. And now the word about Canberra is out, this is the best time to make it your home.

## **CANBERRA'S BEST LIFESTYLE SUBURBS**



Whether you're looking to be immersed in nature, culture or Canberra's flourishing food scene, these are nine of the best suburbs in the nation's capital to lay down roots.



## Kingston

Crossing the park from Barton, trendy Kingston remains one of the city's most coveted postcodes. Known for its leafy streets and bustling foreshore, the suburb combines political and industrial history (it's one of the oldest suburbs in Canberra) with cultural delights, including shopping spots, arts precincts and a plethora of restaurants and bars. Mornings are spent walking or cycling along the lake then refuelling at one of its coffee roasters or artisanal bakeries. The famed Old Bus Depot Markets are held here each Sunday.



## Barton

Nestled on the banks of Lake Burley Griffin, Barton is often considered Canberra's most lifestyle-rich neighbourhood. Minutes from the city centre, its historic homes and government buildings sit along brand-new apartments.

The suburb hums with activity both during the week and at weekends when locals flock to foodie markets and fine-dining institutions. Barton is also home to picturesque Telopea Park, one of the oldest parks in Canberra, with picnic spots and a playground for kids.



## Braddon

Dubbed Canberra's 'hipster' capital, Braddon remains a strong pick among young professionals and the fashionable set.

Walking distance to the CBD, it's known as a hotspot for food and wine, and hosts a line-up of independent fashion, homeware and design stores along Lonsdale Street.

There are weekly village farmers' markets each Sunday at Haig Park and easy public transport links via two light rail stops.

The property scene is comprised of in-demand apartments, with much commercial and residential development underway.

## Hawker

Roughly 15 minutes' drive from the city centre, Hawker borders Pinnacle Nature Reserve, and is prized by those wanting to get closer to the great outdoors. Here



residents can make the most of popular walking trails and abundant native wildlife, while still benefiting from everyday amenities such as supermarkets, cafes and buses to the city centre. Families move in for the local schools, which cater to all ages from kinder to Year 12, and fantastic sporting facilities for an active lifestyle.

## Forrest



Located in Canberra's inner-south, the prestigious neighbourhood of Forrest is home to the Diplomatic precinct and Canberra's "Golden Mile" on Mugga Way.

This is a suburb of record-breaking property, where character-filled homes comprise large blocks and grand proportions. Residents can enjoy a dress-circle lifestyle with access to esteemed schools, the walking trails of Red Hill and everyday essentials at Manuka Village.

## Yarralumla

Adjacent to Capital Hill, the sought-after suburb of Yarralumla is characterised by its beautiful, leafy streetscapes punctuated by classic art deco homes.

This premier suburb has a price tag to match, tightly held thanks to its proximity to the city, quality schools, shopping and cafes. It's recognised for its plentiful green spaces and pretty parks, flanked by Lake Burley Griffin, giving locals endless opportunities for boating, paddling and picnicking by the water's edge.

## Red Hill



Red Hill remains much-loved for its grand, character homes and rambling green spaces. The suburb is just 5km from the CBD, and frames superb views from its namesake lookout and walking trails.

Red Hill is home to excellent schools and beautiful parks, while shopping is taken care of with the supermarkets and boutiques of Manuka just a short drive away.

## Amaroo

Considered one of the top spots to raise a family, Amaroo offers a vibrant neighbourly atmosphere. It has myriad green spaces, quiet and safe streets and a convenient shopping village with supermarkets, coffee shops and eateries. Lying roughly 25 minutes north of the city, residents have access to a good school, excellent sporting facilities and lovely playgrounds all contributing to the strong community spirit. Houses here are spacious and private, sitting on large blocks with backyards.

## Lyons



Nestled in the Woden Valley district, less than 10 minutes from central Canberra, Lyons is a hilly suburb bound by Okey Hill Nature Reserve.

It's desired among everyone from empty nesters to young families for its convenient location, popular walking trails capturing scenic views and strong sense of belonging.

Residents have easy access to local shops at Lyons Place, family-run cafes and Westfield Woden in easy reach.

## **FINDING A RENTAL PROPERTY IN CANBERRA**

Finding the right rental property can sometimes take some time, and perseverance is needed to secure accommodation. Be prepared to commit time and effort to secure a rental property.

We strongly urge students and visitors to arrive on your own in the first instance and not to bring your families until you have confirmed accommodation. Have your finances arranged and be able to provide proof of income.

Rental references that can be verified locally may also be of assistance. We can provide confirmation of your position at the University but cannot give a past rental reference unless you have lived in an ANU residence.

## **Available rentals**

Periodically we update a list of available rental/share properties in the ANU/Belconnen region which are sourced through Housing Online, AllHomes and Gumtree (refer to the reference documents on this page).

The available listings may change without notice and you should use this list as a reference document only, ensuring that you use due diligence prior to entering in to any agreement. You should always view a property before handing over any money.

## **Beware of scams**

When searching for rental properties you should be wary of properties that sound too good to be true. Usually when a property is significantly cheaper than other similar properties in the same area.

You should always view a property in person or have someone you trust to do so for you. Under the Residential Tenancies Act it is against the law to take a deposit from someone to hold a property, money should only be handed over when you are signing a lease and receiving keys for the property.

If you are responding to a shared accommodation advert you should meet the housemate(s) personally before paying any money and agreeing to anything. If you are not sure contact Accommodation Services to discuss any issues.

- Where to search
- Housing online
- Allhomes
- Domain
- Flatmates
- Gumtree

Don't expect to find something on the first day you start looking, give yourself enough time and make sure you have somewhere to stay in the meantime.

Depending on the time of year you arrive, it can take weeks or even months to secure accommodation. The beginning of the year is the most difficult time.

Landlords rarely advertise more than one month prior to the occupancy date. How long the search will take will depend on your budget and your personal needs. Usually it takes between 3-6 weeks to find something suitable.

You need to be proactive and take the initiative to go out and search for the property you want. If you just wait for something to come to you, you will be disappointed and this can be very stressful.

Be persistent and make sure you have all the paperwork you need to put in an application for a property you are interested in. You may have to view a lot of properties and lodge many applications before you are successful. Don't be discouraged if you don't get the first property you like.

### **Things to consider**

## **Budget**

It is important to plan your budget.

Rentals range from around \$A300-\$A400 per week and upwards for an unfurnished apartment or unfurnished small house in Canberra. Rentals in Queanbeyan (a town on the border of Canberra) are slightly lower - rent for a two bedroom apartment will be around \$250 per week and upwards. Furnished accommodation will be about \$50 per week more than unfurnished.

## **Shared or solo living**

Share accommodation is a great starting point for students new to Canberra. The benefits of share accommodation include security, sharing expenses and domestic responsibilities as well as making new friends.

Some other factors you need to consider are the lack of privacy, personality clashes and social distractions that may affect your study.

Where there are more than two unrelated people sharing a house or flat it is classified as a group.

If there are any changes to the occupants in the house or apartment you need to advise the landlord. Agreements created without a landlord's consent have no legal status and this can leave you without legal protection.

## Where to live

ANU is situated in Acton which is part of the inner North of Canberra. Suburbs that are nearby include:

- Turner      Ainslie
- Campbell    O'Connor
- Hackett     Lyneham
- Dickson     Downer
- Braddon     Belconnen

Accommodation in the inner suburbs is often more expensive than the outer suburbs. Public Transport in Canberra is very accessible in all areas and also very reliable, so it is not a necessity to live close to ANU. Suburbs around Belconnen might be cheaper, but you'll need to factor in a 30 minute bus ride.

## Transport

Walking 0-5km from campus: Turner, O'Connor, Braddon, Ainslie, Reid and Campbell). Note rents tend to be higher in some of these inner city suburbs.  
Cycling 0-20km: Any inner north, inner south, inner Belconnen or central Canberra suburb is within an easy ride half hour ride.

The transport & parking page provides information about cycling to uni.

Public transport: ANU is directly served by the 3 and 7 (enters campus), while the 35, 40, 41, 42, and intertown services (300 series) run alongside campus, on Marcus Clarke Street, then down Barry Drive.

The 116, 117, 243 and 244 also run along Barry Drive. The Civic Bus interchange is around five minutes brisk walk from the Civic (east) end of campus and services depart there for much of Canberra.

Northbourne Avenue is to the north east of Campus and many services travel through to Dickson, Belconnen, through Civic and to the south. Check the Action Buses website for timetable information

## **Warning: beware of scams**

When searching for rental properties you need to be wary of properties that sound too good to be true. Usually when a property is significantly cheaper than other similar properties in the same area.

## **Found a place**

Contact the Real Estate Agent or landlord and ask when you can view the property. Be prepared with any questions you have about the property such as:

- Is it close to a bus station and shopping centre?
- What is included in the property?
- How long is the term of agreement?
- Will the landlord consider groups?
- What type of heating does the property have?
- Where do you park your car?
- What fees do you have to pay upfront to secure the property?
- Can you have pets?

Make a good impression! Be well groomed, well presented and on time.

Fill in an application form, if necessary. Don't be afraid to attach any supporting documents that you feel may help.

Be persistent! If you really want the property keep in touch with the agent to get updated progress reports on the status of your application. Keep trying, and do not be discouraged if you do not get something straight away.

## **Signing an agreement**

A tenancy agreement is a legally binding document. Make sure that you read the agreement carefully and understand all of its terms and conditions.

It is important to view a property before you sign an agreement; in fact ACT agents will insist on this. If agreements are broken in other circumstances then you may be required to pay costs related to the reletting of the property.

You will have to pay a bond. This is a refundable deposit on your room or property. It can be up to the equivalent of four weeks' rent, but no more. Bond must be lodged with the ACT Office of Rental Bonds, where it is held until you vacate the property.

If there are any problems at the final inspection the bond will be held until these problems are rectified.

The inventory and condition report is a report which outlines the condition of the property, and any furnishings and equipment attached to the premises.

The agent will give you up to three copies of the report, check these very carefully and note any discrepancies on all three copies. The report must be returned within seven days of moving in. You must ensure you get a copy signed by all parties back for your records.

The agent or landlord can carry out an initial inspection of the property within the first four weeks and then twice within a 12 month period to check the condition of the property. The landlord must give you seven days notice in writing before an inspection is carried out.

## **Furnishing your home**



You may need to buy furniture for your new property. You can save money by buying second hand furniture; and there are many second hand furniture shops in Canberra.

It is also worth looking at classified ads in newspapers such as the Canberra Times and the Trading Post.

You'll find more classified ads for Canberra on Allclassifieds.

Remember to consider how you will get your furniture home. Second hand shops normally deliver for a small fee, but check with them first.

You can save money on household items by going to markets, fetes, and garage sales.

Trash and Treasure' markets are held every Sunday morning in the Jamison Shopping Centre car park in Macquarie, and in the Woden Plaza car park.

Garage Sales and Fetes are advertised in the Saturday edition of the Canberra Times. You are able to rent electrical items such as TVs and fridges.

## **RESIDENTIAL TENANCIES ACT IN THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

In the ACT, residential tenancy disputes are dealt with by the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT). The laws that govern disputes about residential tenancies in the ACT are the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 (RTA) and the ACT Civil & Administrative Tribunal Act 2008. The person who files an application is referred to as the Applicant, and the other party as the respondent. This article deals with residential tenancies in the ACT.

### **Residential tenancies in the ACT**

All leases in the ACT should include the 'prescribed terms', which are set out in the RTA. Unlike some of the other states and territories, in the ACT, if both the lessor and the lessee agree to include an extra term or a term that is inconsistent with the prescribed terms, they may do so by getting ACAT to approve the terms.

This is done by way of an Application for Endorsement. If terms are not approved by ACAT, they cannot be relied on in the event of any later hearing before ACAT.

A copy of the proposed lease and the prescribed terms and the proposed additional clause are lodged at ACAT together with the Application for Endorsement. The tenant(s) and the landlord must agree to and sign the Application for Endorsement.

Applications are usually decided just on the papers included in the application. However, if more evidence is needed, the Tribunal will make a written request.

## **Resolution of disputes about residential tenancies**

A number of disagreements may arise under a residential tenancy agreement which may result in either party lodging an Application for Resolution of a Dispute.

These include:

- tenants defaulting in rent payments
- orders for termination of the lease and
- rent reduction.

When an application to resolve a dispute is filed, the Registrar will decide whether to refer it for mediation or to set it down for hearing before a Registrar or ACAT member.

Parties may be referred to a pre-hearing conference, in which case a written notice advising the date, time and location for the conference or hearing and a full copy of the application will be sent to both parties.

The Registrar will try to assist the parties to resolve it and will work out how long the hearing will take.

An interim order can be made lasting until the final hearing if the party seeking it would be disadvantaged or harmed if it were not made. Consent Orders can be made if the matter settles at the conference, and is not to proceed further.

## Procedures at ACAT

A person may be represented at the hearing by a lawyer or an agent, or they may appear on their own behalf.

If they are unable to appear in person then arrangements can be made for a teleconference. Costs are usually not awarded in ACAT unless one party has caused an unreasonable delay in the proceedings.

At the hearing, the applicant and the respondent will be asked if they want to add anything further to what has been presented in their application or defence, and then the Tribunal will usually hear the matter straight away.

If the respondent does not appear, orders can be made in their absence.

Within seven days of the hearing the parties will receive a written notice setting out the terms of any order made.

## Orders that can be made

**ACAT may make a variety of orders, including:**

- an order terminating a tenancy agreement
- an order granting a termination of lease and possession order
- an order for the payment of rent arrears
- an order for a stay of eviction.
- Failure to comply with an order

If a party does not comply with an order, ACAT may direct a penalty of up to \$5,000. Orders made by ACAT are registered in the Magistrates Court, which means that orders can be enforced through the procedures of that court.

If a termination and possession order is made and the tenant does not leave on the date ordered, the ACAT can issue a warrant for the police to evict the tenant and anyone residing in the premises giving them two days notice.

An application for a warrant of eviction can be made if a conditional termination and possession order is breached. ACAT will list the matter for a hearing within a week and the tenant will have an opportunity to respond to the application.

## **Matters outside ACAT's jurisdiction**

Some disputes regarding residential tenancies in the ACT will not fall within ACAT's jurisdiction. ACAT cannot make any orders for payment of compensation or of work value which is above the sum of \$25,000.

If a tenant or landlord wishes to claim over that amount, they should seek recourse to the ACT Magistrates Court, which has jurisdiction to hear claims for amounts of up to \$250,000.

## **RENTING WITH PETS IN CANBERRA**

A tenant must seek written approval from the property owner/manager to keep a pet at the rental property. It is a significant breach if an animal, other than a working dog, is kept at the premises without the property owner/manager's approval.

If a tenant wishes to rent with a pet during a tenancy, they should formalise their request by completing a Request for approval to keep pet at premises (Form 21) to seek the property owner/manager's approval.

The property owner/manager must respond to the request in writing within 14 days of receiving the request form and state two key pieces of information:

- whether they approve or refuse the tenant's request, and
- other conditions for approval, or reasons for refusal of request.

If the property owner/manager does not respond within 14 days or the response does not satisfy the legislative requirements mentioned above, the pet request will be automatically approved.

The Pet request response template can assist property owners/managers in responding to their tenant's pet request.

Keep in mind that any nuisance and damages caused by an approved pet is the responsibility of the tenant and pet damages are not considered fair wear and tear at the end of the tenancy.

## **Renting with a pet within a body corporate**

For tenants who live in a rental property that is subject to body corporate by-laws, a body corporate committee may also be required to approve the pet in addition to the property owner/manager.

The committee's process may take more than 14 days to consider the request, and a property owner/manager may refuse a pet approval application on the basis that approval of the pet would contravene a body corporate by-law applying to the premises – this would apply if body corporate approval was required under the relevant by-laws and had not yet been obtained.

Tenants are encouraged to refer to their by-laws to identify any restrictions around pets before considering making a request or commitment to keep a pet as breaching by-laws is a breach of a tenancy agreement.

Tenants can dispute a body corporate committee's decision through the Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management (BCCM).

## **CONCLUSION**

If you want to buy a house in Canberra, some restrictions may apply if you are not a permanent resident in Australia. Generally, temporary residents can only purchase one property for their sole residential use but are not allowed to purchase an investment property. The type of dwelling they can buy is restricted also; only vacant

land, new dwellings, or off the plan and they must receive the approval of the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB). After permanent residency is obtained, this creates more possibilities in terms of investment properties. To know more about the regulations regarding the purchase of real estate, please visit the Foreign Investment Review Board website.

## REFERENCES

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