

THE AUSTRALIAN ALPACA

Origin

Alpacas are part of the camelid family - that is, they are related to camels. There are four species, which constitute the group of South American Camelidae. They are the Llama (*Lama glama*), Alpaca (*Lama pacos* or *Vicugna pacos*), Vicuna (*Vicugna vicugna*) and the Guanaco (*Lama guanicoe*).

They originate from South America, with the largest herds located in the high altitude regions of Southern Peru, Bolivia and Chile known as the Altiplano. Life here is difficult. Alpacas not only battle a harsh climate - burning sun by day and freezing conditions at night - but also receive few of the benefits of modern animal husbandry.

Alpacas were first imported into Australia in 1858, but the project failed and none of the alpaca are known to have survived.

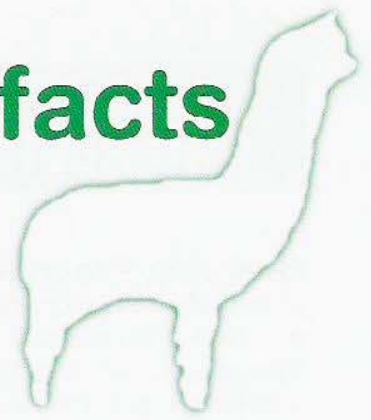
The first of the current alpaca arrived in Australia in 1988. The Australian alpaca herd has since been built from breeding stock imported from Chile and, more recently, from Peru.

The alpaca has adapted well to Australian climatic conditions. While the future direction of the Australian alpaca industry is the promotion and sale of alpaca fibre, the emphasis in this young industry will be on breeding for the foreseeable future.

Alpaca Terminology

Cria	from birth to weaning
Weanlings	from weaning (approximately 5-6 months) to 12 months
Tuis	from 12 months to 24 months
Hembras	adult females
Machos	adult males

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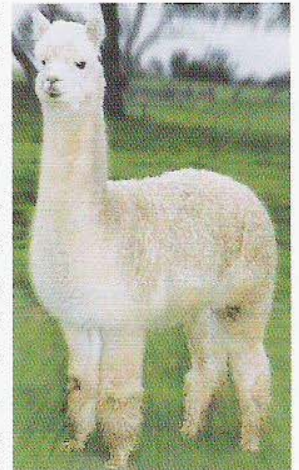


Alpaca Breeds

There are two fleece types of alpaca, the Huacaya and the Suri.

Huacaya

This is the most common alpaca type in South America and Australia. The huacaya has a bonnet of wool on its head. The dense body wool grows straight out from the body. Ideally, fleece coverage is even and extends down the legs. The fleece parts as the alpaca moves and turns, an indication of density and uniformity. The degree of crimp varies, generally increasing with fleece density.



Suri



As a type Suris are very much less common than Huacayas and in Australia only a small percentage of alpacas are Suris. The Suri has a fleece with a strongly defined staple. The Suri is covered in long, pencil fine locks, which hang straight down from the body. Good

Suri fleece is highly lustrous and it feels more slippery and silky than that of the Huacaya.

The predominant Suri colours are white and fawn.

Suri numbers are decreasing in South America but appear to be increasing in Australia.