

# A LIFE CHANGING MOMENT

**Karen Bleakley** embarked on the adventure of a lifetime when she and her husband decided to make the move Down Under with their children permanently...



**“I CAN'T PROMISE THE MOVE IS RIGHT FOR US, BUT WE'RE CERTAINLY GOING TO GIVE IT OUR BEST SHOT”**

Images (clockwise from right), Karen and Matt with their three children; a trip to see the dolphins at Monkey Mia was a turning point; the couple cruising around the Whitsunday Islands; Karen on a day trip to the Great Barrier Reef



**A**s the boat docked, I caught sight of a turtle breaking the surface of the water beside us. I watched as it took a breath and drifted into the clear water.

Moments before, we'd been out on the waves searching for dugongs and dolphins; now we were stepping onto the sand to watch the sun melt into the horizon.

In our few days at Monkey Mia resort in Western Australia we were cramming in as much as possible, including nature talks, boat trips and astronomy sessions.

This was the turning point on our trip... It was the moment when Australia stopped feeling like a holiday destination and started to feel like somewhere we wanted to call home.

That feeling grew as we made our way down the coast, stopping to hike around unique rock formations and wander along deserted beaches.

Fast forward six years, and here we are about to make that dream a reality.

Have you ever thought about moving to the other side of the world? Have you ever wondered what it's like to go through the immigration process? Does it sound too daunting to tackle?

Over the coming months I'm going to share some of my ups and downs with you as I migrate with my young family.

## LIFE AFTER BACKPACKING

After our travels, my husband Matt and I returned to the UK to an epic piece of news: we were expecting twin boys.

With the security of his job (which had been held open) and having doting grandparents desperate to meet our babies, we made the difficult decision to stay in the UK, even though our feet were still itchy. We added a baby girl to the family less than three years later.



Last year we began to think seriously about where we wanted to raise our family. We felt nowhere in the UK offered us the lifestyle we craved. Matt was desperate to return to Australia.

After a few weeks of agonising, I woke up one day and the butterflies that had been living in my stomach were gone. I wasn't overwhelmed anymore; I knew emigrating was the right decision for our family. I'm a huge believer that decisions make themselves when the time is right.

## OUR MIGRATION JOURNEY

After deciding to say 'yes' to the adventure of a lifetime, we soon realised we didn't have a straightforward application. Matt's occupation straddled a few jobs, one of which was removed from the Skilled Occupation List the week we started our application. We decided to find a migration agent because we didn't want to waste time and money choosing the wrong route.

Finding an agent was harder than we expected. Some of them pushed us to sign

up with them, at least one told us things we knew to be incorrect about our eligibility, and others had a very formal process. I kept calling offices until I found one willing to chat and answer my questions. Using an agent isn't essential, but it took a lot of stress out of the process for us. After deciding on the most appropriate occupation with our agent, we began our application for a Skilled-Independent visa last July.

The first step was to get Matt's skills assessed by the relevant trade authority. It took us time to pull together the evidence and paperwork, and then there was an agonising wait to hear that his skills as an Electrical Engineering Technician had been accepted.

In late December he passed his IELTS test and the next day our agent submitted our Expression of Interest. We were invited to apply for our visa in the middle of January and we were allocated a case office a few weeks later.

The police checks and medicals only took a couple of weeks and we received

our visa in March! The entire process has taken eight months.

The last few months have been a whirlwind. The only way we've felt able to tackle the move is by taking it a stage at a time. Our stress has been compounded as we've been renovating our house with three small children around, all with the pressure of trying to move to Australia before our boys start school in September.

When I'm suffering moments of stress and panic, I remind myself that staying put is easy, it's safe, it's known, but nothing worth doing is ever easy.

## TAKING THE RISK

Every time I've doubted whether we could make the move, I thought about all of the retired couples we met while we were travelling. Each of them told us they'd dreamed of emigrating to Australia or New Zealand when they were young. They told us they wished they could go back to being our age and make their choices all over again, because this time they would take the risk. Living with

regret must be an awful thing, and it's not something I intend to experience if I can help it. Deciding whether to emigrate is a fork in the road. You have the power to take your life down a new path. It's scary. It's a lot of work. It's emotional. It's tough. It's exciting.

If making the move is your dream too, just remember the world has never been this small. Social media, blogging, Skype and instant messaging all help you keep in touch with family and friends.

I can't promise the move will be right for everyone. I can't promise the move is right for us, but we're certainly going to give it our best shot.

Our 'for sale' sign goes up on the house today; wish us luck! 🇦🇺

**■ Karen is a freelance travel writer and blogger. You can read about her migration journey on her family, travel and lifestyle blog at [www.talesofatwinmum.com](http://www.talesofatwinmum.com) or on Twitter @TalesofaTwinMum.**