

THE ULTIMATE LEAVING PARTY

A proper leaving party offered a chance to properly say goodbye for **Karen Bleakley** and her family...



As your departure looms, it all begins to feel real. Leaving your friends and family is scary and the closer the deadline, the harder it gets.

I was an emotional wreck as our move approached. I burst into tears as my twins graduated the preschool they'd attended for two years. I'd made so many good friends there, and to know my daughter wasn't going to start after the summer holidays with her friends was heart-breaking. I was tempted to not have a leaving party as I knew it was going to be hard. But I also knew everybody needed, and deserved, the chance to say goodbye.

LEAVING PARTY TIPS

If you're leaving, here are a few tips to help you create an awesome party while preserving your sanity.

VENUE

Find somewhere easy and low-stress. You don't want the hassle of making 200 sandwiches when you're trying to pack up your house. If a friend volunteers to cater, then that's great. Otherwise find a venue that can provide food.

Pick somewhere that fits your comfort zone – do you want a grand send off or a low-key event? We had two leaving parties in different parts of the country so everyone got a chance to say goodbye.

One was a simple barbeque at my brother's house, and the other was a bigger event at a pub near our house. We told people to drop by sometime during a three-hour block and we put on some simple food. People came and went and we got to say personal goodbyes without the pressure of a big party or having to deliver a horrible speech.

TIMING

Hold your party early – three weeks before you go is perfect as it's close without being too close. If you leave it too late you'll be more emotional and will be caught up in doing admin.

DECORATIONS

Even if you're keeping things simple, everyone wants to give you a great send-off. Buy basic party supplies to decorate the room – 'bon voyage' banners, balloons, inflatable kangaroos... If you're lucky, you'll be able to hand over the decorating to a trusted friend so you can just turn up at the party and enjoy it.

LEAVING BOOK

It's a great idea to send a leaving book around your guests. Ask them to write you a message and leave their contact details. (NB: Don't try to read this until you're settled in your new country as you might end up smudging the words with tears – I was only able to read ours without crying three months after arriving in Oz.)



Karen and husband Matthew at their leaving party

Life's a beach: Karen's children, Evangeline, Reuben and Lincoln in the Gold Coast



Images: Karen Bleakley

PHOTOS

Take lots of photos as these will be precious. Taking pictures also helps take your mind off all the goodbyes.

CARDS

Print out business cards that have your email address, Skype name and links to any social media so you can hand these out to guests. There's no excuse for losing touch with anybody in this digital age.

CARDS AND GIFTS

When inviting people to the party, remind them you're on a baggage

“IT'S A BIG STEP IN YOUR JOURNEY, SO IT'S NO WONDER IT STIRS UP EMOTIONS”

allowance so not to buy gifts. Some people will though, so set up a table at the party where people can leave any cards and presents.

ENTERTAINMENT

If you have talented friends, you could get somebody to do face painting with the kids, or if you have a budget you could invite an entertainer to keep them busy while you enjoy spending an evening chatting to your friends and family. We had young kids, so having a secure

playground at the venue was important for us so we could go off and chat without worrying about them escaping.

PROPER GOODBYES

Don't expect to be able to talk to people at your party. It's like a wedding – you can give everyone five minutes and then you need to move on. If there's somebody you really want to say a proper goodbye to, arrange to get together with them another time.

PINTEREST

Pinterest is a great place to find inspiration

miles away. You've got enough to do with the move, so don't go overboard.

SAYING 'THANK YOU'

Write thank you cards/emails/texts the day after the party. You won't have time when you arrive in your new country, so it's one less thing to think about.

HIGH EMOTIONS

You'll be excited and desperate to start your new life but your friends and family don't have this to look forward to. Their lives will carry on exactly the same, just without you in it. It's no wonder some of them might be struggling. Try to be understanding of the people that are negative about your move. Moving to the other side of the world isn't for everyone, so there will be people that just don't get why you're doing it.

BON VOYAGE

Saying goodbye is one of the hardest things you'll ever have to do. It's a big step in your journey, so it's no wonder it stirs up emotions. Enjoy your party, close this chapter of your life, and then let the adventure begin. 🇺🇸



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