

KEEPING BUSY



The family had finally made it to Oz, but for the first hectic month in Brisbane the 'to do' lists seemed endless for **Karen Bleakley**...

Through our migration journey, I focused on getting off the plane. I knew the run up to leaving would be hard (it was). I knew the flight with three kids under five would be challenging (ditto).

I've never felt as emotionally drained as I did the moment we stepped off the plane. Or as excited.

The 'to do' lists didn't end there though. After the jet lag passed, we had plenty to keep us busy. We didn't have the goodbyes hanging over us this time though; we'd made it!

OUR FIRST MONTH

After collecting the hire car, our first task was to explore. Our expat friends had helped us narrow down suburbs based on our personal criteria: family friendly, close to good schools, close to the beach and a small community feel, which in Brisbane limited our search area to just a few choices as there aren't many beaches

“TOP TIP – MAKE SURE YOU ASK IF YOU'RE ELIGIBLE FOR RENT ASSISTANCE”

within easy reach of the CBD.

Our next job was to go into the city to collect our debit cards. Going into the city was a hassle – parking was expensive and it took half a day. If only we'd known we could have asked for the cards to be sent to a local branch!

Remember that your debit card won't work until you've shifted money into your current account – we tried to pay for our parking with our new card and forgot our money was still in our savings!

Setting up Medicare was easy, although the first Centrelink office we visited didn't take drop-in appointments so we had to visit another (a quick phone call ahead would have saved us time).

We'd brought a printout of the application form with us from the UK as we knew we wouldn't have a printer, so we took this along with our identification.

While we were there, we got our Customer Reference Number and asked what other family benefits we were eligible for. You can also then apply online for a MyGov account which is a central account that pulls all of your services (Medicare, Tax Office and Centrelink) into one place.

Top tip – make sure you ask if you're eligible for Rent Assistance. We were initially told we weren't entitled to it on our Permanent Residency visa, but later found out we were eligible and got a lump sum for backdated payments. Applying for a Tax File Number online (and an

Australian Business Number for me) took a few minutes. Getting this sorted early gave us another valuable piece of identification.

Applying for Queensland driving licenses took us 10 minutes at the local office. A tip from a friend was to stagger when you apply for these so when renewal time arrives you don't have to pay for two at once. Each state has its own license, so if you haven't got a job and think there's a chance you might move state for one, it's

Getting out onto the road was not without its initial challenges...



worth waiting as you can drive on your UK license for a time.

Buying cars was a challenge as the kids got bored and it was hard to think straight with three kids 'helping' you choose. It was less painful than I'd expected though – the garages were great with our kids (one of them let them play in a huge Winnebago that probably cost more than our UK home, and another fed our kids while Matt took a car on a test drive – they were incredibly family friendly!)

We bought one car within two weeks of landing, so I'm pleased we didn't book our hire car for longer.

Our biggest learning curve was the car seat laws. We put down a deposit on my car, but before we picked it up realised that having three anchor points in the back didn't mean our new seats would fit (it turned out they didn't). The garage didn't want to lose the sale, so they drove me to a shop to find a seat combination that just fitted and bought it for me!

SUBURB HUNTING

We had previously decided to look for a 12-month unfurnished rental as we wanted to get a better feel for areas before buying. When we linked up with our shipping company, we found our ship was delayed (you can track your container online, but it will probably vanish for a

while – this is normal, so don't panic!)

This meant we had to decide whether to stay in our expensive, furnished holiday accommodation for longer or move into a place without our things.

We decided to start looking at rentals as we wanted to get settled.

One of the suburbs our friends had suggested was just what we were looking for, so we started viewing schools in the area. The school we chose wasn't on the shortlist we'd made in the UK.

Online research is great, but nothing can replace experiencing it in person (and speaking to parents in the park!) Our school also had a kindy attached, so our twins were able to start straight away and make friends before beginning prep, which helped them settle.

We found some schools were already full for the January intake, so it's a good idea to secure school places ahead of a house if you can (some state schools are based on catchment areas but others aren't, and you can live anywhere to go to a private school).

Rental house viewings are usually an open home where many families show up at a set time, but we were lucky to find one where we were the only family viewing it, which gave us an advantage.

We had to complete a rental application form and submit lots of identification on a points system. We also asked the owners of our holiday rental if they'd provide a reference for us. We were accepted and moved into our home four weeks later.

Between each job, we went for a picnic, a play on the beach or we visited a new park. This helped the kids understand why we'd moved them across the world. On the second day, Reuben (who hadn't really wanted to move because he didn't want to "talk funny") announced that he loved his new home so much that he didn't want to go back to "In-gland" as he "liked this new land much better".

Making the move was the biggest challenge we've faced as a family, but now our kids totally get it. They love it here as much as we do. It was worth every bit of hard work. 🇦🇺



■ 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 or on Twitter @TalesofaTwinMum.