

OUR MOVE: ONE YEAR ON



Moving to Brisbane was the right choice for **Karen Bleakley**, who in her final column reflects on the things she has learned...

We're approaching our first anniversary as Australian residents. The last two years have been busy, but moving across the world really is the best decision we've ever made.

The weather in Queensland for instance is incredible. Around 96 per cent of the time there's a clear blue sky. The other four per cent there's torrential rain. We wanted better weather; Queensland was the perfect choice for us.

Yes, it gets hot. Very hot. But it's been life-changing to be able to get up and put on shorts every day and not be trapped indoors with the kids every school holidays.

We've just bought a house, and it's way beyond anything we could have afforded in the UK. I'm not a 'things' person – I prefer to have experiences over objects – but this space has turned our lives around. We lived in a cramped house in the UK; now the kids have room to play and we

“WE WANTED BETTER WEATHER; QUEENSLAND WAS THE PERFECT CHOICE”



Karen with the children at Moreton Island

can relax. I have to pinch myself daily to believe that this is our life now.

OUR FINANCES

We spent more than we expected during the first three months here. We're still not financially settled – Matt is working two contract jobs, but he has a year of Australian experience and a couple of good references behind him, so we're a step ahead of where we were a year ago.

He may need to retrain to use his skills in a different industry, but we're open to ideas and opportunities (being flexible, I think, is essential if you're going to make your move a success). I'm still working as a freelance writer, working for clients around the world.

Matt earns more in Australia than he did in the UK and my rate is similar. Some things cost more over here – our mortgage is higher and electrical goods are expensive, but eating out is cheaper. Food shopping is mixed – you don't get

the 19p 'smart price' deals on things but other things are great value and better quality. Annual passes at zoos and theme parks are a bargain, and the beaches and parks are free!

We spend more on cars now as we run two instead of one (we had no choice as everything here is a drive away) but I save by not visiting town every week to go shopping (shopping malls don't hold the same pleasure for me as browsing around an actual town centre). All in, we're much better off financially here and we have



The family are loving Brisbane's relaxed outdoors lifestyle

more luxuries and a better lifestyle.

OUR VISA CHOICE

Until recently I had not realised just how much your choice of visa can affect your future finances.

We came on a 189 Skilled Independent Visa. We didn't get any relocation costs from an employer (as we didn't have jobs!) but there are lots of positives for this visa. The first is that we aren't tied to the state (if we need to move for work), we aren't tied to a particular job (so redundancy doesn't need to worry us), we could buy a house without paying a large fee and, more importantly, we could claim Centrelink benefits (such as the equivalent to child tax credit, working tax credit and child benefit) and rent assistance (which most people seem to be eligible for) straight away.

I know other migrants living in Australia on different visa types that have a lot of restrictions on these things, even though they had their initial relocation paid for. There are many different visas out there; so it's worth speaking to a migration agent to help you understand the different visa routes.

EMOTIONS

While our kids took the move in their strides (they declared that Australia was home within the first week of landing!),

they have struggled with boredom as we've been so busy.

We've had to drag them around house viewings when they'd rather be patting koalas at Australia Zoo, we've had to take them car shopping when they'd rather be at the beach and we've moved house three times (once into a holiday home, once into a rental and now into our own home). It's been tough to balance keeping them happy and excited about the move while getting stuff done.

Their moods have been extreme at times because they pick up on every emotion around them, but as they're so young they've adapted really well to the new lifestyle.

Moving across the world is the toughest thing we've been through as a family, so we've all had to support each other. Matt and I balance each other out – if I have a down day worrying about jobs or missing family, he comes in positive and lifts me back up, and vice versa. There have been arguments and stressful days, but we've come through it stronger and can usually laugh about it later.

Now that we're finally in our own home, I'm looking forward to living the dream lifestyle we've spent so long working towards.

LOOKING FORWARD

Going through such a big move has brought us all closer together in ways that I hadn't expected. It has also given us confidence; I know we can achieve anything we set our mind to and I'm excited to think about the example this has set for our kids.

If you have a desire to give it a try, you need to follow it. Negative people will do their best to hold you back. Don't let them. Stop looking for reasons not to do it and start living the life you deserve. There are no mistakes in life, only missed opportunities.

Right, I'm off to fire up the barbie... Good luck!

P.S. If you have any questions, or want to say 'hi', hop over to Facebook and send me a message or contact me through my blog. I'd love to hear if this column has inspired anyone to make the move. 🇺🇸



■ 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.