

“Our lives are better”

Moving to sunny Brisbane with her family gave *Karen Bleakley* the confidence to explore exciting work opportunities...



Interview: Liane Voisey

Meet the movers

NAMES

The Bleakley family are Karen (39), Matthew (36), Lincoln (6), Reuben (6) and Evangeline (3)

OCCUPATION

Karen worked as a freelance writer and blogger in the UK. In Australia she works as a freelance writer, blogger, author and founder of migration website, *Smart Steps to Australia*. Matthew worked in avionics on military helicopters in the UK. He now works as a

aircraft maintenance engineer for an international airline

MOVED FROM

Fareham, Hampshire

MOVED TO

North Lakes, Brisbane.

USEFUL CONTACT

If you're considering a move to Australia visit Karen's informative new website: www.smartstepstoaustralia.com to help you every step of the way

We wanted a better quality of life for our kids and felt Australia offered it

in so many ways – better weather, bigger houses, more open spaces, more work opportunities and lower crime rates. I was bored of being trapped in a small house with three young kids for half the year as they all hated going out in the cold. We were also keen to move somewhere new and it felt like it was time to have some new experiences.

Matt and I had enjoyed a seven-month backpacking trip before having children. On that trip we spent a few months exploring Australia and New Zealand in campervans. After our backpacking trip, we couldn't get Australia out of our heads. Still, we returned to the UK expecting twins and put it to the back of our minds.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

A few years later, Matt's work situation changed. We found out his job was going to be ending at some point in the next few years. We knew we were going to have to move so he could find another job. It gave us the push we needed to move to Australia.

Just as we started to explore visas, his avionics occupation was removed from the Skilled Occupation List. After speaking to our migration agent at Sort Out My Visa (SOMV) we were really happy to hear that we still qualified under a slightly different electrical occupation that still fitted his qualifications and experience. This was a big weight off our minds.

While our visa application was processed, we concentrated on renovating our house ready for >>



The family's own swimming pool



sale, getting rid of some of our things through car boot sales, eBay and Gumtree selling.

Matt had to do the IELTS which involved him revising for a month. He got the points he needed on the first attempt but he was surprised how difficult it was.

With SOMV's guidance, the visa application was straightforward. We began the process in August 2013 and received our 189 visa in March 2014. Our house went on the market in May and sold four days later, completing in August. We moved out to Brisbane four weeks later.

Our last week in the UK was the hardest week I've ever experienced. Knowing we were taking the kids away from their grandparents was awful. I always knew it was the right move for us, but that didn't make it any easier.

The move cost around £19,000, including visas, shipping, insurance, medicals, police checks, flights, and our migration agent. Then there were costs when we landed, such as two cars, a bond for our rental and replacing the things that we didn't bring over.

The process was daunting but when we tackled it in smaller

chunks it was manageable. As both Matt and myself have project management backgrounds that helped us to stay organised.

We plan to take citizenship as soon as we can. Not being citizens limits Matt's work opportunities as many of the jobs in the aviation industry require security clearance, which he can only get when he is a citizen.

Although we miss family and friends, this is our home. We love our lives here and can't ever see ourselves moving back to the UK. Australia has too much to offer.

SETTLING IN

We chose Brisbane for lots of reasons. There seemed to be more work opportunities in the aviation industry, the hot climate appealed, and the house prices were more affordable than Sydney or Melbourne. Matt also had an ex-workmate who had moved to Brisbane which gave us a valuable work contact, as well as support.

We wanted to live near the beach, so that helped us narrow down the suburbs in Brisbane as there aren't many beaches.

We loved the vibe on the Redcliffe Peninsula. It's really

family friendly and still close enough to commute to the airport. We rented in Scarborough before buying a few minutes inland at North Lakes.

Although we loved Scarborough and the adjoining suburb of Newport (with its prestigious canal-side properties), we were able to get a much larger house and plot for our money at North Lakes. We chose the house more than the area – as soon as we stepped through the door we knew it was the one.

Our home has five bedrooms, two bathrooms, two large living areas, a big deck that overlooks an 'L' shaped pool and a grassy area with a set of swings for the kids. It is more than double the size of the house we owned in the UK.

There are lots of parks, big open spaces, cycle paths and plenty of shops here. There is also a fantastic English fish and chip shop around the corner.

The weather in Brisbane is perfect for us. It's very hot from October to April and it does get humid – but then that's why you have air conditioning! From May to September it's cool in the mornings and at night but the days are mostly blue skies and T-shirt



Share your story!

If you are heading Down Under to start a new life and are willing to share the story about your move with us, we would love to hear from you! Simply email us at editor@australiamagazine.co.uk



There are some beautiful beaches to enjoy close by

weather. There's something about sunshine that makes people happier. I feel like a weight has lifted from my shoulders as it is sunny almost every day. I adore that my kids walk around with bare feet most of the time, and that we can wear sandals all year round. We can plan to do things without getting rained off. And even if it does rain here, it isn't cold so you can still go out unless it's a bad storm.

We can also be outdoors in the pool for at least six months of the year. My kids were all scared of the water before we arrived but now all three can swim like fish – even the three-year-old. I love being able to fire up the barbeque a few times a week for dinner – it's no longer something we only do a handful of times a year.

GOING INTO BUSINESS

I feel excited to live here and it is satisfying our wanderlust – there are always new places to explore on day trips and short breaks. There's more of an emphasis on going out as a family here, with food markets and festivals, plus there are free barbeque points everywhere, incredible parks and lots of public toilets – families are really

embraced over here. We love to visit Australia Zoo, where we have annual passes.

When you've moved abroad you realise you're capable of anything. The confidence gave me the boost I needed to finish and publish a book on Amazon about expecting and raising twins (called *Don't Panic! A Practical Guide to Twins, Triplets and More*).

Then I put in an application for a Queensland small business grant, and I was lucky enough to be awarded funding towards business coaching. I went on to develop my business idea to set up a website to support UK families who are considering making the move to Australia. Then I received a second grant to help me make it happen.

My website www.smartstepstoaustralia.com launched recently. If I'd stayed in the UK I wouldn't have had this business idea, but more importantly I wouldn't have had the confidence, direction or financial support to do something like this. There is definitely more of an entrepreneurial mindset over here.

I'm excited that I can use my experience to help make things easier for other families. When we

were migrating I felt it was challenging because there wasn't a universal to-do list with all of the resources pulled into one place. I spent days online researching the admin tasks and that was stressful with young kids in tow.

Our advice for other British people wanting to move to Australia is this... You might have 30, 40 or 50 years left to live. That's a long time to feel regret if you don't follow your dream now. Explore the idea of moving. Find out if you are eligible and work out if you can afford to make the move. If yes, work through your worries one by one and give yourself time and space to make the decision.

If the move is right for you, and you are eligible, now is the best time to go for it. Don't risk waiting too long only to find that you are no longer eligible.

You never know if things will be better or worse until you try them, no matter how much online research you do. For us, the main thing I've learnt is that our lives are so much better here. If we hadn't given it a try we'd never have known, but I now have the perspective to know that we made the right decision.

"OUR AUSTRALIA PROS AND CONS"

PROS:

- The incredible weather
- Being close to so many stunning beaches
- Having a much larger house than we could ever afford back in the UK
- Sending our kids to an amazing and affordable private school
- It's easy to holiday in the South Pacific Islands and New Zealand, as well as other parts of Australia

CONS:

- Being away from family and friends
- The distance to get back to the UK in an emergency
- Light summer nights, as it gets dark so early in Queensland
- Missing English fish and chips

WHY MOVE TO... Brisbane

This warm and sunny Queensland city offers a fantastic outdoor lifestyle all year round...

WHAT IT'S LIKE

With a sub-tropical climate, Brisbane offers its residents an enviable outdoor lifestyle all year round. Most of the rainfall is in summer with occasional thunderstorms. Winter is generally dry and warm with cooler evenings.

Brisbane, which has a population of 2.1 million, sits astride a winding river which carves the city into a collection of urban villages, each with their own unique character.

Explore botanic gardens, enjoy riverside dining or hop on a ferry to South Bank to experience the beach in the heart of the city.

South Bank is also home to the Cultural Centre comprising of Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Gallery of Modern Art, State Library and Queensland Museum..

EDUCATION

Brisbane boasts an excellent education system and offers a broad choice of schools. An excellent resource on Queensland public schools can be found at education.qld.gov.au/schools/ and detailed profiles of all Queensland schools can be found at www.myschool.edu.au.

EMPLOYMENT

Construction, education, government, health and retail account for more than half of total employment in Brisbane. Their growth is largely driven by strong population growth across South-East Queensland.

Business services account for more than one-quarter of the Brisbane economy. It's the largest employing sector in Brisbane and a large proportion of the highly skilled professional workers are



Scarborough Beach
in Moreton Bay


located in commercial offices in inner Brisbane.

HOUSING

Brisbane has experienced rapid development over the past decade, particularly beside the river foreshore which is now home to upscale apartments as well as suburban growth to meet the needs of families. Brisbane is typically referred to

as Northside and Southside with the river creating a natural divide.

Most of the desirable suburbs are located close to the CBD and the river and have good transport links.

According to the Real Estate Institute of Queensland the median house price in Brisbane is A\$632,000 (£329,715). 

Homes in Brisbane



LIFESTYLE HOME

A\$639,000 (£333,771)

With a spacious living design, complimented with multiple family and lounge areas, this four-bedroom property fits all your lifestyle needs. Outside is a large undercover entertaining space set in front of a stunning in-ground pool. The master bedroom is complimented with large ensuite and walk in robe.



LOW MAINTENANCE

A\$329,000 (£171,848)

This two-bedroom villa is in a quiet complex, towards the rear, and being on one level it offers low maintenance, easy living opportunities. Features include separate living and dining areas with pretty bay windows, a modern kitchen, a single garage and the use of the swimming pool in the complex.



PURE LUXURY

A\$2,175,000 (£1,136,078)

This six-bedroom property boasts a resort scale north facing patio, accessible from all living areas, with stunning mountain views. The master bedroom suite comprises of a spacious walk-in wardrobe and sumptuous ensuite. The property also boasts a powder room, games room, gym, sauna, tennis court and an in-ground pool.