

A BITE OF THE APP!

There are plenty of tech savvy ways to help keep you connected with family and friends back in the UK, writes *Karen Bleakley*

We moved to Australia as '10 pound poms' when I was little. We'd never been before. It took us weeks to get here on a boat and then we had to wait eight more weeks to speak to family back home on the phone. It's so much easier today," explained a Welsh lady that I'd just bumped into in the lobby of a hotel on the Gold Coast.

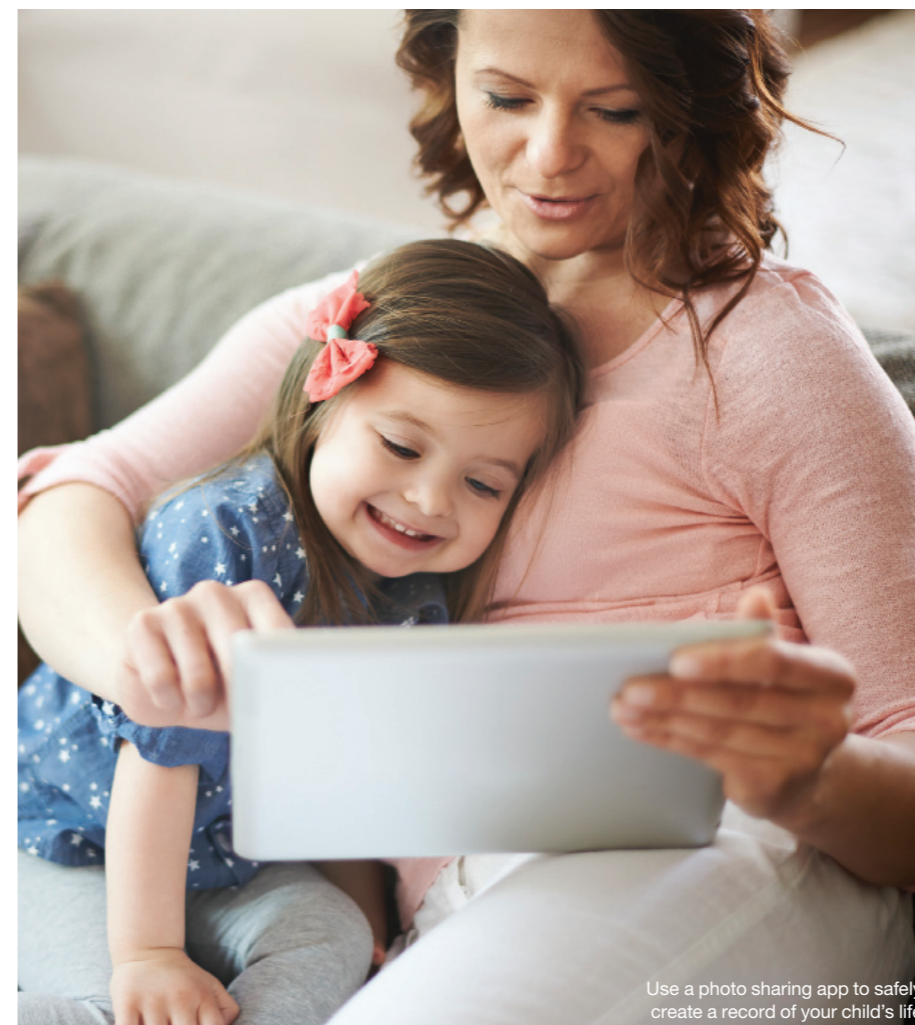
We sat down and chatted over coffee about how technology has changed the face of migration.

I told her what it was like for my cousin and her family when they moved to Australia in the 1980s. They had to apply for their visa on paper and post it off. As a child, I remember their application dragging on for ages. When it was finally granted, they had to move abroad with very little information, but at least they could fly to Australia. Once they settled in Perth, my family and hers kept in touch with an annual letter at Christmas and very occasional phone calls as it was so expensive.

Then we talked about my experience of migrating with my family two years ago. Everything was done online, from the initial research through to the visa application, to the job searching and the house hunting. Now, we connect with our family and friends back in the UK constantly through social media and apps.

If I'm being honest, I'm not sure I could have made the move a couple of decades ago, let alone more than half a century ago like her. There has never been an easier time to move abroad, because the world has never been so small.

I'm not promising that moving to the other side of the world is stress-free, but



Use a photo sharing app to safely create a record of your child's life

technology definitely makes your new life in Australia or New Zealand easier.

You can keep close relationships going where it wasn't possible a couple of decades ago. All it takes is a bit of trial and error to work out which apps work best for you.

When it comes to staying connected, there's more out there than Skype, Facetime, What's App and Facebook. Here's just a few of the options:

PHOTO SHARING

Leaving parents and grandparents behind is one of the hardest things about moving abroad. I know my parents and in-laws were so upset they wouldn't get to see their grandchildren grow up. Sharing regular photos isn't as good as seeing them in real life, but it's the next best thing.

23 Snaps - 23snaps.com

Share a collection of images with your family and friends online for free. It's great for parents wanting to safely share images of their kids with family abroad without having to worry about security, and it's easy for non-techy family members to use as well.

Keepy - keepp.me

This is an incredible tool for families

wanting to stay connected. In Keepy you create a personal record of your child's life – you can store images, videos and voice messages and share them with family, who can then respond.

The free version allows you to add up to five uploads per month, with unlimited kids (but the paid version is very low cost anyway). You can take a picture of your child's artwork, enhance it to get a clear image and your child can explain what the picture is in a message that gets stored

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with the picture. Family and friends can become 'fans' so they can follow your kids' uploads – then they can respond and leave messages too. Your content is organised per year so you can look back on your child's life to see what they created when they were two, three or four.

Tinybeans - tinybeans.com

This online baby journal lets you track and share special moments and information with your family and friends.

It sends updates to family via email, too which makes it great for family members who don't use smart phones.

VIDEO CALLS & MESSAGING

Speaking regularly and seeing each other on video definitely makes the distance feel smaller. Once you get used to the time difference, it's not so hard to stay in touch.

Facebook Messenger - messenger.com

Most people know you can use Facebook's Messenger app to send text, links and images to other Messenger users. But did you know it's free to make phone calls through Wi-Fi/3G by using the little phone icon in your Messenger app? This means it works even if you don't have regular phone signal while you're travelling.

Viber - viber.com

This free app allows you to make calls to other Viber users and send text, videos and pictures over Wi-Fi/3G. You can also call people on a landline or mobile for a low rate using ViberOut.

Voxer - voxer.com

Voxer offers voice, text, video and photo sharing via Wi-Fi/3G. Your contacts can choose to either listen to your message as you're saying it live or they can listen to it later and respond when it's convenient (which is useful with the time difference). You can also speak to large groups at a time, so it's a great tool for staying in touch with friends.

Line - line.me/en

Line is another app offering free video and voice calling, and you can send messages for free to individuals and groups who have the Line app. You can also buy credit and make low cost calls to non-Line customers.

Slack - slack.com

The basic, free version of this remote working app has all the functionality to keep families connected on opposite sides of the world. You can create subject >>

A smart phone will keep you updated immediately

streams so you can see the history of a discussion, share images with one another and also send private messages. You get alerts on your phone when people respond to threads so you can hop back in and reply quickly. I love it!

Bond - getbond.co

This app (currently only on iPhone but coming soon to Google Play) reminds you to stay in touch with important people when life gets busy. And when you move abroad, life will be busy for quite a while, with job hunting, viewing houses, buying cars not to mention the time difference. It's all too easy to let communication slip and lose touch with important people. Bond integrates with email, text, your phone, What's App, LinkedIn and Facebook to send you reminders to make contact.

Path - path.com

A simple, private social network where you can share music, check-ins, movies, books, trips, workouts, photos, and more. You can use it for messaging, group chats or to send voice messages – it means you can virtually hang out with your friends on the other side of the world.

Hey Tell - heytell.com

If texting is taking too long and feeling impersonal, use Hey Tell. It allows you to send voice messages to other Hey Tell users as a fast way to communicate. There's something about sending a voice message too that helps you feel connected and you're more likely to get responses as it's much faster than texting.

Group Me - groupme.com

Keep in touch with all of the groups in your life, such as your family, old workmates, uni friends etc. with this group messaging app. Anyone can be added with their phone number or their email address.

Glide - glide.me

This live video messenger app lets you share moments as they happen. It's a fast back and forth way to video chat. You can choose who to share your content with so you can keep things private. Share sunrise at your favourite beach with someone special, look in on a wedding you weren't able to attend and chat to your friends about what everyone was wearing or send



baby's first steps to grandma so nobody misses out.

SENDING CARDS BY POST

Virtual communication is all good and well but there's something special about sending and receiving physical cards and letters too.

I'm not one of those people that plans birthdays weeks in advance so I knew there was a good chance I'd miss postal deadlines to get cards delivered. Until I discovered these apps, that is.

Inkly - inkly.com

I haven't posted a single card to anyone in the UK since we landed in Australia, yet every birthday and Christmas everyone I care about receives a handwritten card from us. It's all thanks to this app. You choose a card template, add images from your phone, handwrite your message on paper, take an enhanced photo of it using the app and click to have your personalised, handwritten card delivered.

Now that my address book and payments are set up, I can have a card finished in just a few clicks without the hassle of going to the post office. You can also add gifts to your order, and they deliver internationally so family in the UK can use it to send cards to you too.

Touchnote - touchnote.com

Send a personalised postcard or greeting card internationally and show someone you're thinking about them. Upload an image, add your message and address and your card is printed and sent for a budget price for hardly any effort. I love how fast and easy it is to show someone you care.

Thortful - thortful.com

Send personalised, handwritten cards using designs that have been uploaded by creators around the world, or upload your own designs and earn when anyone else goes on to buy your design. This is another great option for families on either side of the world to send cards to one another.

NOW IS THE TIME

So if you're thinking of moving abroad but are daunted by the idea of leaving family and friends behind, just remember that if ever you were going to choose a point in history to make the move, right now is the best time there has ever been.

While I can't promise that you won't miss your friends and family in the UK, I can promise technology is only going to come up with easier, faster, cheaper and smarter ways for us to stay in touch. 🇺🇸

■ **Karen Bleakley is a Brisbane-based travel writer and founder of Smart Steps to Australia – a new website helping UK families navigate their way to a dream life in Australia. For migration tips, checklists, step-by-step guides, a list of reliable experts and a supportive community to help you every step of the way, visit www.SmartStepstoAustralia.com and sign up to the email list on the homepage.**

