

SHIP SHAPE

Take the stress out of moving your belongings
Down Under with these tips from *Karen Bleakley*



When we decided to move to Australia, we knew we'd ship our belongings with us. We'd gathered so many mementos from our travels over the years, and we'd also spent 10 years collecting furniture we loved and which made our house feel like a home.

After doing some research, we felt happy that shipping our things wasn't going to cost us any more than travelling light and replacing everything new in Australia. Plus it meant we didn't have the pressure of getting rid of a house full of things, and we wouldn't have the stress of dragging three kids under five around the shops to buy a house full of furniture when we arrived.

It's all personal choice though; many people we know got rid of everything >>



Make sure you are insured for your belongings to be shipped

What not to pack in your container

- Wardrobes. Many homes in Australia have fitted wardrobes.
- Vacuum cleaners and lawn mowers (unless they're quite new). They take a lot of cleaning and are easy to pick up when you land.
- Cheap furniture that was once flat packed. They aren't the best use of space as they don't travel well and can be replaced cheaply.
- Anything that is irreplaceable. Bills, medical records, precious memories, identification – don't pack anything in your container that you aren't willing to lose.
- Anything you're going to need for the next few months. This should go in your travel luggage.
- Check the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service website for the latest advice on prohibited items: www.agriculture.gov.au/travelling/moving-immigrating.

What to take in your container

- White goods. If your washing machine is in good condition, and you are confident you can clean it, then bring it as it will be expensive to replace over here. The same goes for your microwave. Tumble dryers also come in handy during stormy and humid weather.
- Bed linen. If you're bringing beds, bring linen to match as sizes are different in Australia.
- Electrical goods. Don't be put off taking electrical goods because the plugs are different. It's easy to have an electrician switch the plugs over when you arrive.
- Books. Books are expensive here, so if you have a book collection, it's a good idea to bring it as replacing it over here will add up.

they owned and set up their home with new and second-hand goods. It's easy to do with sites like Gumtree and shops like Ikea around, so don't feel you need to bring everything with you.

SHIPPING EXPLAINED

You can ship any amount you like, from a few boxes with an excess baggage company, to a 20 foot or 40 foot container. You can have a container for yourself or share one with others to reduce the cost (although this tends to delay your shipment a bit.)

I looked at reviews in forums, and I found it easy to narrow down the main companies. I checked they were FIDI and BAR registered and then narrowed down my favourites to get quotes.

One piece of advice I picked up in the forums was gold – remember that the person who comes to give you a quote is not the person who will be packing your belongings. Although you may get on better with one sales person over another, it's more important to focus on the content of what they're saying rather than who is the better sales person.

From the research I did, I found that all of the shippers had a certain amount of negative feedback online. They deal with high volumes of customers, so things will go wrong sometimes. For me, the key was making sure they offered great customer service so that in the event of something going wrong, I could be confident they'd be able to resolve issues quickly.

FINDING A SHIPPING AGENT

Write a list of the questions you want to ask each company and make notes of their answers so you can compare later.

Invite them in to quote within a couple of days of each other. If you space it out you may find you've added new furniture or changed your mind about things, so the quotes won't be like-for-like.

I also found it helpful to have a list of things we were taking in each room to make sure they all got the same information. This meant I didn't forget to tell them we had five bikes in the shed or 10 boxes in the loft.

Make sure the quotes are comparable and that you understand what is and isn't included. Find out about extra fees and ask how much free storage you get in each country and the cost of extending that in case it takes time to find a rental. Also, ask

how far they deliver and what are the charges for delivering outside that radius.

Find out how they propose to manage moving day. Will they bring the container to your street? Will it fit? If there isn't space on your street for a container, does the shipping company offer an alternative? The company we used, for instance, had a warehouse nearby and they transferred our things in multiple van loads.

Ask who will provide the service at the other end. Do they have their own agents in the other country? If not, who will be used over there and will you still liaise with your UK contact when the shipment has left the UK?

What services will be included in the removal fee? Will you be expected to flat pack every item of furniture or will they take your tables or beds apart. Bear in mind you are usually expected to dismantle everything unless you have asked them to quote for this.

Will you need to provide the box for your televisions or are they quoting on providing crates? Check if crates are

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needed for delicate items like mirrors or framed pictures, and make sure everyone's quote includes the same number of crates.

Find out how much notice they will need to book you in and what happens if you need to push the date back due to house sale delays.

DECLUTTER, SELL AND CLEAN

Getting ready for the shippers was more time-consuming than I expected. We went through every room getting rid of things that were prohibited, along with things we didn't want to take. We sent bags of things to charity, gave lots away, sold things on eBay and Gumtree and did car boot sales.

We thoroughly cleaned everything we wanted to take, from bikes and shoes to our washing machine, barbecue and tools. Once we'd cleaned things we made sure they stayed indoors so they couldn't get dirty again. By the time the shippers came, our dining room, hall and spare room were stacked to the ceiling with things ready for packing.

Find out who provides the shipping services at the destination country



INSURANCE

Find out what insurance options the shipping company can offer, however, don't be afraid to look at external insurance. Our shipping company charged a lot for the convenience of insuring through them.

Arranging an external insurance company took me about an hour to sort out. I put together a list of value estimates for groups of items such as clothes, televisions, office equipment and kitchen goods. It wasn't as time consuming as I expected.

Whether you decide to go with your shipping company's insurance, or find an external insurer, make sure you take out

insurance. You never know what items could get broken in transit, despite how carefully everything is packed.

When our shipment arrived, lots of items had been damaged – from mirrors and dishes to speakers and drawer units. The total replacement value was close to £1,000. Claiming on the insurance was easy. No receipts were needed – I sent photos of the broken items with estimated replacement costs and the claim was settled quickly.

Whether you decide to get rid of everything you own and start over, or you decide to streamline your things and take a container of valued possessions, moving abroad helps you shed layers of junk and start your new life with a clearer focus. Of course shipping involves work, but so does getting rid of everything and replacing it. For us, I love that we've been able to bring our UK memories to our new Australian home. 🇦🇺



■ 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.