

Episode 7

[00:00:00] Welcome to The New Life in Australia podcast, hosted by me, Karen Bleakley, founder of Smart Steps to australia.com. Moving to Australia with my family was a life-changing experience, but it wasn't without its challenges. That's why I'm passionate about making the relocation and resettlement process easier for you so you can enjoy this exciting adventure.

Join me and my special guests as we share professional secrets and tips. Learn from people who've made the move and discover businesses that can help you realize your dreams. Now. It's the best time to create the life you've always wanted. This podcast is here to show you what's possible and to inspire you every step of the way. Let's go

Let's take a moment to acknowledge the Gubbi Gubbi people, the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which I live, work, and play. I thank them for the privilege of being able to live in such an incredible part of the world, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present, and emerging.

Hey there [00:01:00] and welcome to episode seven of the new life in Australia podcast. Today I'm chatting again to my good friend, Tracy Collins, who you might remember I interviewed in episode three of the podcast, all about her move to Mackay in Queensland and her relocation down to Brisbane. Today, we're going to be talking about something a little bit different.

We're going to be talking about her experience as a house sitter. Now, Tracy and her husband, Doug, have been really lucky to find some incredible house sitting opportunities, both in Australia and beyond. And we talk all about them, about their arrival experience and about all of the different travel opportunities they've been able to have while house sitting.

So I think it's going to be a really good one. It's something that I never considered before. I actually met Tracy and she told me all about her experience, how sitting. So I'm really looking forward to you hearing her story. Hey, Tracy, can you please introduce yourself? Tell us a bit about who you are, where you're from, and where you are now living.

Sure Karen, thanks very much for that intro. So yes, my name's Tracy Collins. I live in Brisbane. [00:02:00] I'm originally from the uk. Though I have lived all over the world, so I will just say that. But I am, I am British and now Australian

'cause I have Australian citizenship. Yeah, so I live in Brisbane, in, in our, in my fifties now.

And moved to Australia about 7, 6, 6 and a half years ago. Yeah.

And so today we're talking a bit about your house sitting experience. Can you tell us a bit about how you started house sitting and just just give us a, just a brief few lines. Just tell us about what your house sitting experience.

Okay. Yeah. Started House Siting about, about seven years ago, I think at, at. Heard about it from lots of people who love travel and I, I like to travel and obviously try to save a bit of money when we travel. And house sitting is a really good way to do that. So I figured when we were about to move to Australia, that I would, I would have a look and see if there were houses sits in Australia.

But previous to that we hadn't done any house sits at all. I'd kind of joined, trusted, have sitters and kind of . Was interested in how it worked. And then actually in the last, last [00:03:00] few months before we left the UK to move to Australia, we'd, we'd sold a house and moved into a rental prior to moving over.

But we had obviously getting out the rental timing's quite vital. And I actually found a house set that lined up with the last three weeks we're in the uk. So that, so we did that. So that was actually our first house sit which worked perfectly.

So when it came to, obviously you were in a house sitting in the uk, you'd booked your flight, had you to Australia, you knew when you were moving here. How easy was it to coordinate one for when you arrived in Australia? How did that all fit together? I.

It actually all fell into place. It was crazy. It all aligned. I found the house. Sit beside where we lived in the UK and applied and we got that house sit for the three weeks before we actually flew out of the uk. And then we traveled for about three or four weeks before we arrived in Australia.

And I had been looking on trusted house sitters once I knew where we were gonna be relocating to in Australia. And I just thought out of interest, I'll have a look because obviously you've gotta think about when you arrive, where you're [00:04:00] gonna stay. So I just happened to have a look on, on the house sitting site, and there was a house sit.

In the exact place that we were moving to and the exact week we were moving to that destination, and it was for three and a half months. It was like gift.

Oh my goodness. So all the stars aligned. It was just pure luck, really, but you, but you, you made your own luck by being on the lookout for the opportunity.

Oh, absolutely. If I hadn't known about looking on house, sit-in, I would not have even known that that was a possibility and I would've come over and I would've paid, you know, expensive to stay in a hotel for the first few weeks or a relocation agent to try and find me some US accommodation. But actually I didn't, we, we literally spent I think four days in a.

In the hotel in Mackay before, actually Emma, who we helped set for she was going off for three and a half months to, to finish some some education she was doing. So we met up with her, we met the dogs we had a chat about, you know, what the expectations were and everything. And then yeah, that was it.

After that, we [00:05:00] literally moved in to the house and we had a car.

Wow. And three and a half months, that's a huge amount of time to take such a big pressure off your shoulders when you first arrive as well. So you mentioned you had dogs to look after as well, obviously, how sitting. We should say is usually around people who've got pets that need someone to come to stay in their home.

Whether it's a cat they want feeding or dogs that they want looking after. So there is usually some pets involved in, in the process as well. So you, you actually moved into a home. You had, how many dogs? Was it two dogs, did you say?

Two dogs, two dogs to look after. So we had to obviously, you know, looking after the dogs. So it's, it's a few walks a day looking after the dogs, keeping them occupied looking after them health-wise. One of them did get bitten by a snake after about two weeks, so that was something I'd obviously come from The UK was a bit, I didn't know.

About what sort of snake it was. So I had to deal with that with the vets and I was late to work 'cause I'd heard the commotion in the back. So I went through the backyard and I saw that the dog had a snake. So I was like, oh, I have to deal [00:06:00] with that. So yeah, you do have the, obviously the responsibility of Of the pets.

But, but it really honestly pays off because we had this beautiful four bed roomed beach house with a pool, a car just to look after these two gorgeous dogs for three and a half months. So obviously no bills. We had no bills to pay.

Yeah, that's huge. And also just back to the snake, what you were saying, obviously you were living somewhere a bit more rural, somewhere, like in the middle of a city. So you're not so likely to. with snakes in your backyard if you are like in Brisbane city center or somewhere like that. But yeah, so you had bill free, you had access to a car, you had a home for three and a half months. That is pretty amazing. And you didn't have to pay anything for any of that. That was all included just in return for looking after two dogs.

Absolutely. So you just pay your annual fee to the House Citizen agency. So once you paid that, there was no other fees. We didn't have to pay any bills or anything like that. So basically, For three and a half months, apart from [00:07:00] putting petrol in the car and paying for our phone access, that there was nothing else.

We didn't pay anything else out. Obviously food, but nothing extra. So it was an enormous help because obviously, you know, it, it cost quite a bit to move to Australia. So it was, it was a really good start for us for those first three and a half months, not to have to pay anything out.

yes, for sure. And how did getting a house sit like that help you get settled? How was it useful for you? Just in the process of moving here and not knowing anybody and not having anything How was it to just move into a place that was all set up for you?

I think it removes that stress of having to find somewhere. I mean, past finding the, the hotel accommodation for the first few days, we didn't really have to think of anything past that. So it meant that we were a little bit more chilled, went about starting work. Because we, we knew we had, we literally knew we had three and a half months to actually find somewhere.

In that where we'd moved to before we had to vacate [00:08:00] the, the house sit. So that gave plenty, plenty of time to actually start looking around and, and also decided, we actually decided not to stay in that particular town in, in Queensland. We moved down to Brisbane, but it gave us those three months where it actually took the pressure off because if we had decided to stay there, it would've been much easier to figure out which area we wanted to stay in.

And that sort of, obviously we don't have kids what we do, but they're grownups. So, but if you've got the pressure of kids as well, thinking about which schools you want 'em to go to, I guess it takes a bit of that pressure off. And obviously the financial pressure is massive that it takes off 'cause you don't have any bills to pay.

I can't imagine it must have saved you so much money over that three months. 'cause I know that we spent thousands on our first month's accommodation, and then we had to really rush to buy cars really quickly and to rush and find a home and rush to find a school. And it, it was a real. Time pressure when you first get here was we've gotta sort all this stuff out really, really quickly. So to know that that's just, you can chill for a few weeks and just let things settle and [00:09:00] find your way around and kind of find your feet and everything. Must have been a real relief.

Oh it was, and I reckon we saved a good 25, 20 \$6,000 in those few months.

Which is massive 'cause you can then put that towards buying your new home or whatever it is you want to do. So that's huge. So can we just talk a little bit about your profile on the sitting website? So, kind of like your resume, isn't it? Where how sitters you can apply and how Sitters can the, the clients can have a look at your profile and see if you are the right person to look after their pet. So do you create a winning profile that makes you stand out from the crowd?

Well, I just put a photo of me and Doug on it and just said what we do or what we did for jobs as well. So I guess . And also a, our age I think helps because we're in our fifties. And the fact that we had did have references because we'd, we actually had house sat for a friend on Vancouver Island back back 20 16, 20 15.

So she'd written us a reference and [00:10:00] then other people who would looked after their, their dogs or pets when they'd gone on holiday had kind of written us a reference to start us off. And obviously then we got the reference for the first. House sit that we did in the uk. But I think it's really important that if you have got experience with animals, that you put that on there.

Because I've, we've always had, I've always had dogs my entire life. We've always had dogs and we also had cats, so I'm used to dogs and cats. So we're very happy to look after dogs and cats. So just be really clear about and put photos on of, you know, of your pets and . That, which is what we did. Obviously unfortunately we've lost all, all our pets now.

I have to just say this is one other advantage of how Sitted is that, because I'd love to get a dog, but we travel too much. Is that you get to, you get to spoil other people's dogs and enjoy that time with a dog without having to keep it, you know, forever, which is lovely. So you don't have the responsibility.

Yeah, exactly. I think it's like grandchildren, you know, it's that sort of thing.

Oh, do you [00:11:00] think that there are opportunities for families to be able to house sit? I know that's something that's always stopped me from bothering to look into it was that when we moved here, especially, we obviously had really little kids, now they're a little bit older. Do you think there are opportunities for families or do you think it is easier if you're just a couple or a solo person doing it?

I don't know, but I know that the first house that, that we did, they Amad had, had people with families house sit in there before. So I don't think that it would've been any issue if we'd been traveling over with kids either. Obviously where you would struggle is if, if, if you have your own pet, and I know some people will take their own.

Pet with them. But that can be an issue, I think. But to be honest, every house is different. So I think you just have to have a look and see what the criteria is. And if you put their annual profile, you know, that we've got three kids or we're traveling with our dog or usually a dog, then, then people can make a decision.

You know, if they've got a friendly dog that doesn't mind other dogs come in at their home, then they might not mind. So it's that, it's that sort of thing. I think everything is about that [00:12:00] communication because you have to apply for a house sit anyway. You don't just get it. You have to . Apply and say why you'd like to do it.

And, and, and then the person at the other end who's kind of look looking for the house sitter will get the chance to vet and they will, they will have a chat with you. So we had a couple of Zoom chats with Emma before she made a decision. 'cause obviously she had a few people to choose between. So you're not always guaranteed that you're going to gonna get the house sit that you want.

I mean, we've been pretty good. And to be honest, I now get approached through the trusted house sitters for. For how sits in, in the area, because occasionally I will do them. And people say, are you available? And we'll do it that way, but I don't think discount anything. And also don't discount, actually

sometimes the also a house sits where there aren't any pets that people just want somebody to look after the house for the period of time.

They're away. But again, it's, you just have to have a look and see what, what will match you.

I didn't realize people put their houses on just to look after their houses. So you don't always have that pet. 'cause obviously if you've got a pet to look after a dog, then you can only go out [00:13:00] for such a of time period. You've got kind of come back to walk the dog. Whereas if it's just a house, sit for the house and you, you've got a bit more freedom to kind of go out for a long day out. So. With us being living in Australia and we're originally from the uk when we go back to travel there, we are usually back for quite a few weeks in a block. And I know that it can be really tricky to find accommodation. And also living with relatives and things for like four or five or six weeks when you go back can be really tricky too, especially when there's a few of you traveling. Have you done any house sits for sort of long periods when you've gone back to travel to the UK again?

We haven't, but it's not something that we don't discount doing in the future, mainly because we do a lot of traveling around the UK when we go back. So tend to stay with family, but also for our own business. So we do a lot of traveling that way. But it's not saying that we don't do house sits and other destinations around the world though.

But we haven't in the UK at the moment. Maybe if we went back for six months, I probably wouldn't wanna. [00:14:00] Little bit, all our relatives with us for that length of time and there certainly are plenty of houses in the UK for sure.

That's great and, and like you say, all around the world as well, it's not just limited to certain countries, so. Whether you're from the US, Canada, or wherever you are, there's gonna be house sitting opportunities if you go back for a long visit. So you were saying you do some local house sitting now, and I know you still go on holidays and house sit and you've a holiday coming up to a house, haven't.

Yes, yes. I leave on Sunday actually for New Zealand. So going we, we've got a week in New Zealand doing, traveling around North Ireland and then I'm actually flying down to, so that's to do some work for one of our websites. But after that I'm flying down to Christchurch for two weeks to have sit and look after a lovely, lovely little dog called Henry.

So I'll be house sitting there, which is gonna be fantastic. It's gonna give me a couple of weeks break to just get on and do some, some work. And then, and then my husband's flying over for the last nine days and we'll do some travels around South Island again for our for one of our websites.

[00:15:00] So it, it's a great way of doing that. I, I wouldn't have been able to do that. When we initially planned the, the trip to New Zealand, I was very much wanting to go to South Island too. And I couldn't figure out a way that I could do that. And I just happened to look was we were both gonna fly back to Brisbane on the 25th of August, and I actually looked at it and and I realized that there was a house sitting in Christchurch on the 25th of August.

So I just applied and they were like, yeah, absolutely. Come, come and stay with us for two and a half weeks. So yeah, and then my daughter's also coming over for a week of that as well. I was, I asked them, is it okay if, if my daughter comes to visit obviously you've gotta ask. And, and they were absolutely delighted and I said, absolutely no problem.

So

love it.

it's a great way to save money and see the world.

what a great way to travel, and I know that New Zealand was high on your bucket list of places you haven't been to before. So house sitting's enabling you to stay for a couple of weeks on the South island, which is gonna be beautiful. You're gonna love it

Yeah, I can't wait. I can't wait.

are to carry on doing this carry on house, sitting here and there.

Just kind of using the opportunities as they show up.[00:16:00]

Oh yeah, absolutely. Well, we're planning, we're traveling for about five months, coming up soon. And even though I've, I've started looking in the different countries to see if there's house sitting available. Definitely a lot of houses sits in, in North America, in, in Australia, . In, in Europe. It's a little bit more tricky in, in Asia where I've been looking, but it's definitely worth, worth looking at.

You know, if you can, especially for me, 'cause as I can work anywhere, I am kind of digital online work that I can go anywhere to work. So if there's a house sit for three months somewhere you know, there's no reason why I can't go off and, and sit and do that house, sit, enjoy that area. So, and also do some work while I'm there.

So it's, it kind of marries up both things. It's fantastic.

Yeah, it's perfect. what tips do you have for anyone who is moving to Australia and they're considering doing what you did and looking for a house sit for their arrival?

I think that it would be a good idea to join one of the house sitting groups. So I'm part of Trusted House Sitters. There are a few and there are some . Like specifically focused on countries. So there [00:17:00] are for Australia. So it might be worth having a look at which ones you wanna join looking at your profile, getting your profile sorted, maybe even doing a house, sit in the UK before, so you've got that kind of reference.

And then just having a look to see what's available. There's also a Facebook group on House Sitters that's worth joining and having a look on there and asking advice. But certainly Australia, Australians do like house sitters coming around and looking after the house. It's very normal here.

It's not something exceptional and honestly, you may look out like we did it. It was incredible. I can't, you know, I look back on it now and think everything lined up for us so well, you know, I can't, I was thinking now three and a half months, we saved such a lot of money. We settled into the area much easier because we, we didn't have the stress of looking for a house or thinking about all that stuff.

At least for the first few weeks. We could just get used to it, figure out where the, where the supermarket was and where the shops were, and where the doctor was, and all that stuff without also having to think, oh, we have to go and buy furniture. We have to pay an [00:18:00] exorbitant amount for a hotel every night.

So yeah, it's, it's, it's really worth doing. It's really worth looking at to see if you can, you know, have the opportunity. Like, like we did. You know, it's a great way to travel, but also a fantastic way if you can get it when you're coming out to Australia to help you to settle in.

for sure. Is there anything that you wish you'd known before you started house sitting?

No, I think I really enjoy it, so I think no, probably just that, that how good it is. I. And just that it's, it is a genuinely great, you just have to like animals. I will say this, really, if you are doing it, as I say, there are some that come up that don't have expectation, look after animals, but majority do have animals.

So I think, yeah, you, you know, you, you're not going, if you wanna go out and do weekends away, you can't. So for us, when we were in Mackay, we were looking in that Emma came back a couple of times from her course and she . Spent weekend, so we could go up to the Witt Sundays and things like that. We could have weekends away, but we would not have been able to do that for that three and a half months [00:19:00] if she hadn't come back.

So you have to think you are committing that you, apart from a date, maybe a few hours out in the day that you, the expectation is that you are there looking after the animals and that you're there for the house. So I think that's something you've gotta consider. It's not just a, it's not a holiday. You are actually there to, you've gotta keep the house clean and tidy.

Gonna make sure that animals are, are, are, you know, kept looked after, like you would look after your own. So it's that it is still responsibility.

Yeah, no, no, that sounds fantastic. Well, thanks for telling us all about it today. It's definitely something that I. Didn't even consider when we moved to Australia and I really wish we kind of thought about it, although when we moved we had three very little kids and I think it would've been quite hard work being in somebody else's house with, with very little kids. But I think now my kids are a bit older. It's definitely something that I'm keen to, to have a bit of a look into especially as we've got a little dog as well now and our, our kids are kind of used to being around animals all the time, so it's definitely something we'll have to look into. But thanks a lot for sharing your experience of house sitting with us.[00:20:00]

Oh no. Absolute pleasure. Thanks Karen for having me on the show.

So I hope you enjoyed that episode seven and you'll find the show notes over on smartstepstoaustralia.com. Slash episode seven. And that will have all of the links in there, including a article on my website where I've chatted to Tracy more about her experience of house sitting. And there's also a link as well to the house sitting company that she uses.

Thanks for listening. And I hope you found it really useful.

If you've been inspired after listening to this episode to give house sitting a try, I can't wait to hear about it. Please drop me a DM either in Instagram or on Facebook or tag me in a post or something just to tell me what your plans are and tell me what you're getting up to because I think it sounds like a really great way to travel the world.

So thanks Tracy for such a great inspiring talk.

Tune in again as we build Your New Life in Australia, one episode at a time