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EXECUTIVE LIFE

Confessions Of A British Expat: Here's What One Woman Learned About Australia After Moving Down Under

ALEX HEBER | OCT 3 2014, 10:30 AM | BOOKMARK | 115



Australia can be an intimidating place. It's got big sharks, creepy crawlies, snakes and the cost of a beer in some pubs is enough to send you broke.

For an expat it's not the easiest of places to navigate, even though we speak English our slang at times can make it seem as though we've created a completely new language.

"It's everyday language and if you're not really tuned in you can walk around like a zombie for the first few weeks," author and British expat Sharon Swift said.

You only have to head down to your local rissole, (translation: Returned Servicemen's Leagues club) to be exposed to some classic Australian English, especially if patrons are three sheets to the wind.

Swift told Business Insider how moving to Australia and settling in can be difficult for foreigners. But it's not impossible.

Swift is an international boss when it comes to relocating around the world. She's completed 18 international moves in her lifetime, including Brazil, the US, Egypt, Germany and now Australia.

Setting out for Australia ten years ago, with her husband at her side, Swift has managed to settle in Australia, learn the ropes and even write a book which outlines six steps to smooth out what can be a rocky transition process.

Here are some of the things she's learned along the way.

The first thing she realised is, "If you don't like it you can always go back."

She said once you realise going home is an option, everything else becomes a little simpler. Kind of.

It takes a long time to move to Australia

Once you've made the decision to go, the excitement of moving to Australia can begin to waver as piles of admin tasks stack up on the ol' to-do list.

"The dream, if you like, becomes more of a reality," Swift said.

At least six months before you jet off you need to start dealing with all your possessions, visa requirements and industry certifications.

"People have no idea that it can take just heaps of time to plan the move," she said, adding taking a project management approach to the move can help.

Pre-booking short term accommodation and transport are also helpful tips, Swift dished out.

Australia isn't a sunnier version of the UK



Photo: Simon Thomsen

It actually does rain Down Under, in fact if you get caught up north in the wet season you are at risk of getting drenched by a tropical storm.

"People come here and they think it's going to be it's bikinis and surfboards," she said. "It's not."

"No one told me it rained in Australia," she said. "I thought it was sunshine 24/7."

Just because Australia was colonised by the UK doesn't mean it's going to be the same, Swift said one of her biggest realisation was how different Aussie culture is.

"It's exciting and Australia is English speaking and it's seemingly a very similar culture to the UK but you've got to get in your head that it's very different," she said.

Shipping south changes your perceptions on everything

Moving Down Under can conjure up the fear of missing out or #FOMO.

She said weddings, births and deaths will all go on at home, and you're not going to be able to make it back for everything.

"All of this stuff is going to happen without you," she said.

"What you don't realise is that when they repatriate back to their country, five, ten years later a lot of people find it hard to accept that life has moved on without you.

"Any international move is going to change your perspective on everything."

Don't expect to have many Australian friends straight away



Premier of NSW, Mike Baird catching waves. (Photo by Cameron Spencer/Getty Images)

After moving to Australia you'll probably want some friends but speaking from experience, Swift said don't come to Australia and expect to make true blue Aussie friends straight off the bat.

"A lot of people move here hoping to have a whole lot of Aussie friends and it generally doesn't [happen]," she said.

Unless it's through work or a sporting team, Swift said it's difficult to infiltrate existing groups.

"People need to expect that they'll be friends with expats for the first few years," she said.

Australia is a huge place

The size of the sunburnt continent can make travelling a logistical nightmare.

Take Sydney – to get from one end to the other can take hours. HOURS.

Swift also said in Australia you're almost "expected" to have a car. Whereas in the UK a lot of people might not have the need for a vehicle.

Vegemite isn't the same as Marmite

The whole Vegemite situation can throw some new Aussie recruits off, Swift said it really isn't the same as the UK's Marmite.

Emergency numbers are different

If you're in trouble calling 999 like you do in the UK for an emergency service won't really help – it's triple zero in Australia for fire, police and ambulance.

Attitudes to water are different

Water is really important in Australia – don't be caught wasting it, Swift said.

"It's not in abundance here [in Australia] like it is in other places," she said.

"Water's not so precious to us [in the UK] because it rains all the time."

You can't buy booze in supermarkets but you can take your own to a restaurant

People like to eat out in Australia, there's plenty of outdoor restaurants scattered around the country but there's another difference – a bunch of them are BYO.

BYO means "bring your own" alcohol – for a small fee you can bring your own beer or wine to the venue.

"In the UK and in the US in most sates you can actually buy booze in the supermarkets, and you've got BYO restaurants," Swift said.



Matt Cardy/Getty Images



Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Photo: Ryan Pierse / Getty Images.

*Sharon Swift is the author of *So You're Moving To Australia? The 6 Essential Steps To Moving To Australia*.*

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