

# The right move Down Under

Clare and Frank Howard moved from a small village in Berkshire to the 'world's most liveable city', Melbourne. Now proud property owners, Frank tells us how they did it

**T**HERE WERE a range of reasons which together made the UK an increasingly unattractive place to live.

The cost of living was constantly increasing, everything closed at 5pm, crabby people, pretentious and snobby neighbours, overcrowding, poor summers and nothing being fixed properly: everything was "make do".

My two children were teenagers who wanted to go to university and it was becoming common for parents to take on second mortgages to finance their children through college.

All these pressures were affecting people, so the people you worked with were constantly moaning and complaining. They were not just classic whinging poms, they were unhappy with what was happening in the UK and to UK society in general. Then of course, there was the weather. It was just time to go.

## Down Under

We moved to Melbourne because we had relatives there, but even if this hadn't been the case, Melbourne would have been the location of choice based upon previous visits to Australia. It is full of happy people and benefits from four seasons and after all, it is "the world's most liveable city"!

Both my wife and I are working with people who are happy, friendly, more relaxed and tolerant. There does not seem to be the pressure to constantly achieve and advance, people enjoy their work, and who and what they are has no effect on their social interaction.

Now, our son is at university, our daughter is doing well studying the Victorian equivalent to A levels and we have just bought a house.

## Employment

My wife and I are both working harder and longer hours but we are enjoying the challenge.

Clare worked in health care in the UK and as it is top of the list of priority jobs in Oz she got a job very easily. Originally, she applied for five jobs and got offered all five within two weeks of applying. We were also lucky as it only took me about three months to get a job, for other Brits that I have met it has taken between six to twelve months.

I am now working harder and longer hours. The dream of becoming a semi-retired beach comber is unrealistic. My experience is that if you work hard and don't whinge here, you are respected. My sense of job satisfaction is far higher here and I certainly would not consider going back.

Looking back, we didn't do enough research before we left. In regards to researching the employment market, this was difficult. I tried using a web site called [www.seek.com.au](http://www.seek.com.au) to try and generate some interest in myself before I arrived but with no success.

A problem I found was that the Oz employers use employment companies to sift through the applications and the employers only get a selection, so you don't get near the employers unless you are selected by the employment company.

Another problem is that, when you are sending out multiple applications for a variety of jobs if the employers happen to be using the same employment agency, your desperation shows, once again some guidance and advice would be extremely useful. The employers do not like un-solicited job

applications, as I found out.

**Property**  
We are buying a house and the solicitor we are using is so friendly and helpful it is quite disconcerting when compared to our recent experience in the UK, while selling our house the solicitors actually had very little contact with us. Our house is a five-bedroom detached property with a ten-metre pool and a spa. It sounds very pretentious but we were only looking for a property with three good sized bedrooms and room to accommodate our children's friends when they came to visit. The extra rooms, pool and spa were an absolute bonus.

Due to the extreme difference in the property market between here and the UK I would say it is highly unlikely and inadvisable to buy before or as you arrive. We rented because it gave us time to explore the various suburbs and assess their viability as an area to live in.

Even though we had rented and tried to understand the Australian system of selling property after several months we were struggling.

So we employed the help of a company called Buyer Solutions who were able to spend time researching and visiting prospective homes. made the decision to employ them to find us a house very easy when my wife and I were in full time employment which made house hunting difficult.

There are plenty of houses, but finding the right house is very different. The task was made more difficult by the bias of the system towards the seller. In the UK you do not sign the contracts, and therefore commit yourself, until the final phase of the purchase process.

In Australia you sign immediately and if there is anything you missed in assessing the property it is your hard luck, you are committed having signed the contract. This produces the situation where the real estate agents are simply trying to get you to buy any house, regardless, in fact the techniques they used I would describe as bullying. This situation of 'buyer beware' worried us greatly and this is where the experience of Buyer Solutions was invaluable and removed these concerns. Two weeks after we employed them, we were found the perfect house.

## Fitting in

Because of the high number of migrants, from all over the world, in Melbourne you do not feel like a very obvious stranger or new arrival. You will hear every conceivable accent and the Australians are very friendly and inviting. The thing I have found is that you do not feel like a stranger. Almost everybody I have met is from somewhere else, people migrate here from all over the world and I am just one of them, it's great.

It has been difficult adjusting to the shift in seasons, July is deep winter and December is high summer. Learning to drive by the new rules was also a challenge, but we managed it. Australians are very friendly and they love the British accent. We have all experienced this and it acts as the perfect ice breaker.

## Advice for others

If they are very reliant on their families in the UK then don't migrate, they are unlikely to settle and very likely to give up and go back and that is very costly. It should not be an impulsive



Above: Frank and Clare love it in their new home Down Under

thing, if you analyse it too much you won't do it, like getting married, buying your first house and having chil-

dren if you think about it too much you won't do it. This is a fabulous place, and after you have been here a while you'll wonder why you didn't do it sooner. I know I do.

decision, they have got to want to come over and accept that they will be 12,000 miles away from friends and family.

In reality they will only be a day away by plane but they will not be down the road where you can pop in for a cup of tea.

Come out for at least a month and travel around the different states, they vary such a lot. Try establish a link with a recent migrant and ask them lots of questions. It took us six months to settle properly, it wasn't until you had been in your job for a couple of months that you realised that it was not an extended holiday.

Don't hesitate and delay, be brave and do it. Like any-

□ *Buyer Solutions is a property consultancy, specialising in buying homes for clients moving to Australia. They provide sound advice, guidance and support to clients in an unfamiliar market and system, aiming to secure the best possible property for the lowest price. They research the property market, offer advice and assistance ensuring our clients are fully informed before making crucial decisions. Visit: [www.buyersolutions.com.au](http://www.buyersolutions.com.au)*