



TorFX Guide to
Emigrating to Australia

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Introduction

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As far and away the most popular destination for British expats, with over 1.3 million Brits already living there, you certainly won't be alone if you make the move Down Under. A former colony and still a member of the Commonwealth, Australia seems like a pretty natural fit for those looking to relocate to a sunnier climate without having to worry about overcoming a language barrier. That said, the local lingo (otherwise known as Strine) can be a bit of stumbling block for newcomers, but like most things it's easy enough to pick up with extended exposure.

Also, it's probably better not to try imitating the accent straight off the bat lest you put your foot in it with the locals; keep the G'days to a minimum until you've spent some time getting adjusted!

As the sixth largest country in the world by landmass, there's plenty of space in Oz to spread out. Most of Australia's major settlements are located along its rather expansive coastline, with great access to some truly spectacular surf and many miles of golden beaches. It's a beautiful, varied country, with terrain ranging from the iconic red desert of the centre to the lush rainforests of Tasmania and the misty Blue Mountains of New South Wales. Local temperatures and climate equally range, with tremendous differences between the country's major population centres and outer reaches. With that being said, for the most part Oz still tends to be on the warmer side than here in the UK with the temperature low averaging around 10 degrees Celsius and highs ranging upwards of 30 degrees Celsius.

Due to its comparatively isolated island nature, modern Australia is a land built on centuries of migration. Expats have settled alongside the indigenous people for generations, with a definite sense of multiculturalism permeating the country. As such it shouldn't be too hard for new arrivals to integrate themselves into the wider national community, so long as you uphold the Aussie values of fairness and mateship and strive to find your own place within this great nation.

Things to Consider

Relocating to the other side of the world is a big step and there are a lot of things you'll need to think about before you take the plunge.

Relocating to the other side of the world is obviously a pretty big step and there are a lot of things you'll need to think about before you take the plunge and book that one-way flight.

Most importantly, you're going to need to do a lot of research. Bear in mind that this isn't a holiday and it's certainly going to require a lot more planning than one. This is a life-changing, potentially lifelong commitment and you want to do everything you can to make sure it's a success.

With that in mind, in the rest of this guide we'll be taking you through all of the major points you're going to need to think about when planning your relocation.

One of the most important considerations to get to grips with before you go is figuring out how you're going to be moving your money abroad and how to get the best exchange rate so you get the maximum return.

Of course, in order to be able to live in Australia in the first place you're going to need a visa. Deciding which visa to go for and navigating your way through the application process can seem like a pretty daunting prospect but we'll do our best to guide you through the basics.

Though the options for getting your worldly possessions over to Australia are limited to by air or by sea, we've also provided you with some important information on how to choose the right removal company to suit your needs.

If you're planning on waiting until you're out there before committing to either buying or renting a property, later in the guide we'll be laying out the details on some of the most popular expat settlements and highlighting some of the things you'll need to consider about the process of buying a property abroad.

We'll also be covering schooling options for your children and what employment options might await you in Oz.



Moving Money

If you're moving abroad then your money is going to need to go with you sooner or later.

Whether you need to move funds to Australia to purchase a property, get your pension payments transferred or simply convert your existing savings to cover general living costs, you're going to be engaging in some form of foreign exchange.

While there are a number of options when it comes to transferring funds overseas, the two most popular are using a bank or a specialist currency broker/international money transfer provider.

The general assumption may be that your own bank would be your best choice here and it can certainly seem easier when you already have an account and relationship with them.

That can be a bit of a misleading mindset however, as most banks fail to offer competitive exchange rates and tend to levy transfer fees – reducing the amount of money you receive.

You also need to be aware of the fact that the foreign exchange market is one of the most volatile trading platforms in the world, with the potential for massive and dramatic movements taking place within hours or even minutes.

Fluctuations can be difficult to predict if you don't know what's going on in the wider world, or about the various economic data that can quickly (and often without warning) see a currency rise or fall.

Over the course of a standard day rates will generally move around a fair bit, meaning that a trade could potentially be worth hundreds or thousands more or less by the close of trading compared to what it was at the start of the day. While some banks don't move their rates in line with the market throughout the day, instead opting to fix the rates they offer at their opening value, currency brokers track movements to make sure that they offer you the most up-to-date rate. Currency brokers will also keep you up-to-date with the latest exchange rate news with regular market updates and can provide guidance on the best time to move your money overseas.

Additionally, as currency brokers tend to work off different margins they can often offer more competitive exchange rates. That could mean a saving of thousands even before you take transfer fees into account.

In order for you to get the best bang for your buck, or Australian Dollars for your Pounds, it makes sense to shop around and find the deal most suited to meet your individual needs. The specialist services of a reputable currency broker could be the route to saving yourself a lot of stress, as they work to make sure you get the best rate available and don't sacrifice any of your hard-earned funds to extra fees.

The international money transfer services brokers can offer range from setting up an automatic Regular Overseas Payments (ROPs) account to fixing a favourable exchange rate up to two years in advance of a transfer, an option that's particularly useful for those looking to purchase property in Oz.



Visas

In order to enter Australia you're going to need a visa and getting one of those for the purpose of permanent residence can be a bit tricky.

Unfortunately relocating to Australia isn't as easy as simply packing your bags and hopping on a flight.

In order to enter the country you're going to need a visa and getting one of those for the purpose of permanent residence can be a bit tricky.

There's also a rather large range of visa categories to navigate your way through, with more than seventy individual visas on offer to cover the full array of purposes for staying in the country – from business, to holiday, to retirement, to residency.

Fortunately there is an online wizard provided by the Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection to help make sure you're directed to the correct visa for your needs. It will also walk you through all the stages you need to tackle in order to make this move a reality.

That said, if you're planning to work while in the country you'll need to be able to nominate an occupation from either the Skilled Occupations List or the Consolidated Sponsored Occupations List and you'll usually need to have a job lined up for you on arrival.

The primary visas of this category are the Temporary Work (Skilled) visa and the Skilled Independent visa. The former is an employer-sponsored program which allows the applicant to work for an approved business for up to four years, at the end of which time you need to either apply for another visa, permanent residency or citizenship, or depart the country.

On the other hand, the Skilled Independent visa is a points-tested visa which requires you to meet a number of major criteria, scoring upwards of 60 points across categories of age, English language ability, skilled employment, qualifications and Australian study.

Fortunately for those of you who want to live out your post-work years in Australia, it is one of a limited number of countries to offer retirement visas.

However, you should note that you will not be entitled to any additional medical benefits through this scheme and that retirement visas do not lead to either a permanent residence state or full citizenship.

You also have to be over 55 in order to be eligible, must not intend to work in the country and must prove that you are capable of financially supporting yourself while living in Australia.

If you're struggling to get to grips with the visa application process it's worth seeking independent advice and support.



Buying Property

If you're moving abroad then your money is going to need to go with you sooner or later.

Studies have shown that the most popular Australian destinations for expats are the nation's coastal cities, with significant British-born populations in Sydney, Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne in particular.

That said, there are a number of factors to consider when deciding whether to settle in one of the various urban centres of this vast nation or its more rural regions, including the climate, job opportunities and pace of life.

While Sydney is the biggest of the Australian cities, and subsequently a good place to find a job and enjoy an active social life, somewhere like Perth is relatively cut off from the rest of the country.

Quieter locales include Adelaide, with its generally Mediterranean weather, and Darwin, which is considerably hotter and more humid thanks to its latitude.

Brisbane is more moderate in terms of climate while the inland, government-centre of Canberra may be a cheaper alternative for those not as fussed about living by the sea.

The Tasmanian capital of Hobart is also worth a note, as another more remote and somewhat colder destination.

If you plan to buy a property in Australia and really want to make your funds stretch further it could be worth looking a little further inland or to slightly less urban areas, but bear in mind that properties there are cheaper for a reason.

'Rural' in some areas of Australia can be pretty synonymous with extreme remoteness, so just make sure you look into where you're buying before you fully commit to life in one of the country's more remote areas.

Although the process of buying a property in Australia is not an especially complicated one, and the lack of a language barrier does ease the process, it will pay to seek the assistance of a reputable local lawyer to guide you safely through the red tape and help you navigate any of the potential pitfalls.

Most foreigners will need to seek approval from the Foreign Investment Review Board (FIRB) before making a purchase.

You can normally expect to be given an answer within 40 days, although they reserve the right to take up to 130 so you need to take any potential delays into account.

That being said, a new-build property is less likely to require approval, although be sure to always check with a lawyer before drawing up contracts.

In order to cover all the various costs you'll incur when buying you should budget between 5-7% of the purchase price, as these fees range from government taxes to building insurance and termite and pest inspection.

With all these extra costs to consider, the exchange rate you achieve when transferring your Pounds to Australian Dollars could make a very significant difference.

A specialist foreign exchange service worth considering when buying property abroad is a forward contract, which will allow you to fix a transfer at a favourable exchange rate up to two years in advance, enabling you to budget more effectively and be sure that you can afford that dream house when the time comes.

It's also worth considering renting a property in Australia for the first few months of living in the nation. Renting will give you a proper opportunity to get a feel for the country and ensure you've settled in the right area before you make the commitment of buying a property.

Removals

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Australia is a rather remote place and given the general distance between the nation and anywhere else in the world you won't be able to transport your household belongings yourself, thus – unless you only plan to take a suitcase – you're going to be in need of a shipping and removal service.

Although it is generally more common than not for Australian accommodation to be let and sold unfurnished, there are still opportunities to rent a furnished house or apartment – something you may want to consider to avoid paying for the transport of some of your more bulky items.

Further to that point, you may also want to consider whether it's more cost effective to buy basic household items and furniture once in Oz, allowing you to leave behind anything you aren't too attached to or can afford to replace.

Transporting all your furniture to the nation only to find it doesn't all fit in your new home would be frustrating to say the least so having accurate measurements of your new home before you do an inventory of goods to take with you may be advisable.

When it comes to sending your possessions to Australia your options are to go by either air or sea.

There are pros and cons to each method and, understandably, the cost can vary significantly.

Sending goods abroad by air is naturally faster but by sea is typically the cheaper of the two options. You can also save on shipping via sea if you opt to use a shared container, rather than a sole use one – of course this does mean you can't utilise the full space, so this may not be an option if you have a lot to move. There can be other downsides to this approach as well as it may ultimately be easier to store and retrieve a container that is exclusive to you.

It's worth noting that while expats are required to arrive in the country within six months of their goods reaching land, it may be advisable to not wait too long, on account of mounting storage fees that your shipment can incur.

It's also good practice to have the receipts on hand for any recently purchased electronic goods, as additional duties can be incurred on items that you haven't owned for twelve months or more.

Get several quotes before picking a removals service and find out what they offer (do they provide boxes and a packing service, for example) before committing. For your own peace of mind it's always advisable to conduct a thorough inventory of your possessions before packing them. Take photos for proof of condition and make a copy for the removals firm you're using.

Finally, where possible, try to engage a removals service which has been recommended to you or has a number of online reviews from satisfied customers.



Banking

Australia is a rather remote place and given its distance from the UK you're going to be in need of a shipping and removal service.

With a solid reputation in terms of global financial systems, Australia boasts an advanced banking system with established online and mobile support.

While many UK banks now operate on an international basis, opening a bank account in Australia is advisable if you plan to stay in the nation long-term.

The local banking sector is dominated by the 'four pillars', major banks that are prevented from merging under antimonopoly laws.

The four main Australian banks are the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, the National Australia Bank, the Australia and New Zealand Banking Group (ANZ) and Westpac.

If you're looking to set up a local bank account then the chances are that you're going to be doing it with one of these major players. To that end, you may want to look into all four and see which offers services which best suit your needs.

It's quite easy these days to set up an Australian bank account before you even enter the country, particularly with banks like ANZ, and you may in fact find that it's easier to get your account opened before you actually touch down in Oz.

To open a bank account once in the nation you will need to provide photo identification, proof of a residential Australian address and, potentially, a bank statement from the previous three months.

Australian banks also operate a scoring mechanism that requires a cumulative total of 100 identification 'points' to enable the activation of an account, with different values attached to each of the possible ID forms.

While a driver's license only provides 40 points, a birth certificate nets you 70 points and, if you apply within six weeks of landing, a passport is valued at a full 100.

Although a number of international banking organisations do have branches based in the country it would be considered advisable to open an account with a local bank at the first opportunity as this will simplify the process of moving funds to and from the nation.



Work

If you are planning to work in Australia, there are a number of skills that are in demand Down Under.

Job satisfaction, working environment, fairness among employees and work-life balance are all rated fairly highly Down Under, with the general experience of working in OZ appearing to be a worthwhile one.

Something commonly mentioned by existing expats is that the Australian workplace is generally more laidback than elsewhere in the world, although it should be noted that the degree of informality can vary significantly between cities and individual businesses.

The majority of Australian employers also look for employees who are a good fit for the company and have the potential to be a supportive worker who contributes to the team.

Given that a large number of the people who migrate to Australia obtain their visas on the basis of either holding a generally desired skill or as the result of sponsorship by a local employer, you're probably going to have to find a job before setting down in the nation.

Employment opportunities may also have to drive your choice of where in the country you choose to relocate, as areas such as Sydney and Perth are likely to have greater opportunities for employment than the smaller towns or cities.

Construction and mining tend to be prime areas for job seekers looking to relocate to Australia.

It's definitely a good idea to check the Skilled Occupations List for a good indicator of what jobs the country is particularly in need of.

If you happen to be on a career path that isn't listed, don't count yourself out as this doesn't mean you can't relocate to Australia.

If you can find an employer to sponsor you and come from an occupation that's on the Consolidated Sponsored Occupations List there is still the opportunity for you to enter Australia to work for up to four years. For more information please see the Visa section earlier in the guide.

Thanks to the internet, it's a lot easier these days to find, apply for and even secure a job without having to make the long trek out to Australia.

In addition to specialist sites, a number of national newspapers also run employment adverts on their websites. Applications can be sent via email while interviews can be conducted using Skype, so as long as you're prepared to put the time into looking, you should be able to find that perfect vacancy eventually.



Pensions

If you're thinking about retiring Down Under it would be a good idea to assess your pension options.

If you're thinking about spending your golden years in Australia you'll need to consider how you plan to fund your retirement – including how best to manage your pension payments.

The retirement age in Australia is between 65 to 67 years of age depending on the date of the claimant's birth and is equal across the sexes.

In order to qualify for the means tested state pension in Australia – also known as the Age Pension – you will need to have been resident and working in Oz for ten years prior to retiring.

In addition to this, Aussie workers are entitled to a Superannuation Fund. An employer is required to put at least 9.5% of an employee's income into a Superannuation Fund, with the money becoming available for access upon retirement in either a lump sum or regular payment.

British nationals can also benefit from the social security agreement in place between the UK and Australia which allows for the waving of some of the minimum requirements that may otherwise bar you from accessing state benefits.

Any pension funds you have accumulated before making the move Down Under can also be transferred with you. If you are moving to Australia for the express purpose of retiring then you will need to look into setting up a regular payment method in order to move your monthly pension instalments overseas.

While you can move money overseas on a regular basis through your bank, most international bank transfers are subject to fees that can really eat into your funds long term. However, you have also got the option of setting up a Regular Overseas Payments (ROP) account with a reputable currency broker.

While some currency brokers will be able to move your money without charging any fees, a ROPs account also ensures that international currency payments are conducted automatically on a pre-set date, eliminating all the hassle.

As you can set up more than one ROP at a time, it's the perfect way for dealing with things from meeting mortgage payments to handling international school fees.



Schooling

Australia boasts one of the best education systems in the world, so it's a great place to put your children through school.

Australia boasts one of the best education systems in the world and ranks highly in this respect on the Human Development Index, so it's a great place to put your children through schooling.

Depending on the area you move to, there should be plenty of schools to choose from, although naturally the bigger cities will have a little more in the way of variety than rural locations.

It's also important to note that compulsory school ages do vary slightly between different Australian states, with the school leaving age shifting from fifteen to seventeen depending on location, so your children might be eligible to leave education a little sooner than you might be expecting.

Generally, however, primary school runs from Kindergarten to Year 6 (ages five to twelve) while high school covers Years 7 to 12 (ages twelve to eighteen).

The Australian academic year is also variable between states but as a general rule of thumb runs from late January or early February to mid-December. It's important to remember that the seasons down under are the reverse of those here in the UK, although the school year follows a similar winter-summer cycle. Exact dates for the inter-term holidays will depend on the institution and naturally shift a little between years.

Public schools in Oz very much adhere to a zonal system, so if you want to get your children into that school with the great reputation you'll need to make sure you buy a property within the catchment area.

Of course, there's also the option of paying for private education. While this is obviously more pricy than public schooling, it does mean you aren't constrained by location.

Faith-based schools are also on offer throughout the country and while you will still have to pay to get a place, they are generally somewhat cheaper than the secular private institutions.

Education doesn't have to end at 18 though. Australia supports TAFE colleges for more vocationally-inclined teenagers and is home to several of the world's best universities.



Emigration Checklist

Given the distance between Australia and the UK, it's essential that you are well organised and that you keep track of every stage.

- Get your visa sorted before you do anything else; no visa, no move. Check your passport is up to date long before you get to the airport.
- Decide which of your belongings will be making the journey with you and which you can afford to replace once you arrive; keep the clutter to a minimum to cut down on hefty shipping costs.
- Book one-way tickets for yourself and all those going with you and make sure to get the shipping sorted on your worldly possessions well ahead of time – especially if you're sending them by sea.
- Consider opening a local bank account before you depart for Oz to save yourself some worries, otherwise be sure to prepare all the necessary documentation as mentioned earlier in the guide.
- Sort out your finances and find the most competitive exchange rate for your Pound to Australian Dollar transfers by making a comparison between banks and currency brokers.
- Make sure you declare everything you need to at customs; food, plant and animal goods all need to be declared on entry. Failing to declare any items could get you into a fair bit of trouble as Australian Customs are, contrary to the stereotype, not a laidback lot.
- If you want to take any animals with you be sure to research the requirements you'll have to meet in order to get your pets into the country legally and bear in mind that there will be import permit costs and quarantine to pay for on arrival.



Ensure that you've told the tax office that you're going and have made any necessary arrangements regarding your pension and other social security benefits. While you're at it, remember to register for a new Australian tax number to get the ball rolling.



And last, but not least, be sure to pack some sunscreen as the temperature Down Under is much hotter than the UK!





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