



Good migrations

Would you swap rainy, recession-ravaged Britain for a new life? More of us are choosing to emigrate - and you don't have to be young and carefree to join the exodus, finds Ben Quinn

You've just joined the ranks of Britain's 2.26m unemployed, it's raining outside and the paint is peeling from the wall at a gloomy coffee shop where you're pondering what to do.

If, though, you belong to a generation that has enjoyed the sun-kissed, carefree bliss of the backpacker trail, then this may be the moment that deciding whether to swap recession-hit Britain for balmy and buoyant South Australia becomes a no-brainer.

With the jobless rate at a 12-year high 7.2%, tens of thousands of Brits are preparing to follow the masses of Aussies and Kiwis going home to economies which have avoided recession.

Of course, British emigration is nothing new. Just think of the "£10 poms", the disparaging antipodean nickname for the waves of workers tempted to pay sticks by incentives in the aftermath of the second world war. In contrast, money is frequently no longer the guiding principle for today's crop of often quite well-off expats. Quality of life is the new holy grail, while many can fall back on sizeable cash reserves accumulated during the boom times.

Not everyone is invited to the party though. In a world where sophisticated immigration policies have been tailored to the needs of individual labour markets, the door is open only to a "migrant elite" with specific skills in demand by growing economies. And unlike their predecessors, large numbers of those who do qualify also have no intention of coming back.

Typical in some ways are the Mercer family from the Wirral, who are set to move to Australia this year.

"My expectation is that Australia is a land of opportunities where hard work will be recognised in a way that I think it is taken for granted here," says

Tony Mercer, 31, whose property business went bust when he was caught in the eye of the economic storm last year.

Despite being an aircraft engineer by trade, his skills did not meet the qualifying criteria because he had not used them in recent years. Instead, they secured the points needed to move to Australia because his hairdresser wife, Jane, has an in-demand skills set.

With two children, seven-year-old Samuel and Jessica, four, the Mercers' preferred location is Adelaide in South Australia, the star-performing regional economy in the country.

Such a move doesn't come cheap, however. Aside from air fares, they estimate that a family of four is likely to pay around £5,000 during the visa ap-

'I sold the car and the house. Weighing it up, it's quality of life that's important'

plication process, a system they describe as "a minefield".

Given the difficulties, it's perhaps unsurprising that enquiries have shot up at the Emigration Group, a UK-based company which employs former Australian immigration staff and manages visa applications.

"More people are having serious concerns about the future of this country," says its director, Paul Arthur. Increasingly his customers are, he says, young, middle-class professionals citing high taxes, poor weather and poor services as reasons for emigrating.

The vast majority are homeowners, although the stagnant property market has meant some are biding their time

before they raise the capital needed. Increased demand has also seen extra staff being taken on by Study Options, which places Britons in Australian and New Zealand universities.

Cofounder Stefan Watts reports a surge in business from professionals wanting to ride out the recession by

taking time to study and is seeing more clients who are older - in their late 20s or 30s - and time poor. Many of them look forward to returning to a country they once backpacked around and are unfazed at getting little or no support to pay fees such as the typical £8,000 a year for undergraduate degree courses.

Will Morrin, a 38-year-old from Glasgow who was made redundant last year from his job as a broker, is about to embark on a three-year radiography degree in Newcastle, New South Wales, even though he was accepted for a similar degree here with no fees to pay. "I have savings and had been doing a bit of thinking so I sold the car and the house. Weighing it up, what's important is the quality of life," he says.

"Weather is the number one draw, and getting away from the rat race. I think that things in the UK will only get worse once interest rates [start to go up again and] kick in."

Once qualified in a sought-after profession, he may stay



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for four years to qualify for Australian citizenship or move to Canada, another economic lifeboat of choice for many.

Increasing numbers of UK nationals have become permanent residents in Canada, up from 5,199 in 2003 to 8,128 in 2007. Though it has not escaped the global downturn, the International Monetary Fund has identified Canada's economy as one which will recover strongly and quicker than others, thanks largely to a boom in sectors such as technology.

Those qualifying for any of the 38 listed occupations, including financial auditor and cook, may have their visa applications prioritised, while rugged provinces such as Alberta also need workers in a range of sectors.

A more immediate option for highly educated Britons are the Gulf states, magnets due to their tax-free regimes. In spite of the recent blow dealt to Dubai's ascendance, the economy of the United Arab Emirates remains on course to grow at least 3% next year. Less-glamorous spots such as Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Bahrain are booming.

Matthew Lewis, the Dubai managing director of financial headhunters Correlate Search, says expats are drawn to the Emirates because of old "pull" factors, such as zero tax, and new "push" factors, including the UK recession.

"There has been a demographic shift. Before it was probably all about the money and the tax but now people are taking a longer-term view," he says.

"They have a 10-year outlook rather than a two-year one, and come with their minds made up not to return to the UK. The attitude has changed from one of making a quick buck to one which values a fresh and better life-

style overseas. It's a 'what is there to go back to?' mentality."

Many such Britons fit into a "young, free and single" bracket. But as Lewis points out, major advances are being made in sectors such as education, which are likely to enhance the appeal of a move to families.

"Remember, Dubai is a country that is trying to achieve a 100-year revolution in 10 years or so. Once it rides out this downturn, it's going to come back very strongly," he adds.

Traditionally Britons have tended to emigrate during the good years while preferring to stay put in uncertain economic times. However, the sign from this recession is that the "new" emigrants are bucking that tradition. While a different curve of emigration - which included many retirees - peaked in 2007 and began to decline early last year, the latest data from the Office for National Statistics shows that a new trend for emigration began to pick up again in the second half of 2008.

More than 165,000 UK nationals had emigrated last year by September.

This year's yet-to-be published Brits Abroad report by the Institute for Public Policy Research will show most Britons now emigrating are highly skilled, although the net loss of such workers seems to be decreasing. Work, lifestyle and adventure are listed as the three main reasons for emigrating, although many of those moving for the latter two reasons will also be working.

But perhaps most interestingly, the report is expected to reveal how advances in remote working mean that a rising number of Britons are having their cake and eating it, by emigrating and retaining their jobs back in the UK.



Will Morrin plans to study in Australia



Lands of plenty Global hotspots

South Australia

Thriving on the back of a boom based on rich natural resources. Adelaide may lack the bright lights of Sydney or Melbourne but has an enviable quality of life. Engineers, quantity surveyors and accountants in short supply.

Climate: Mediterranean. Hot summers, cool to mild winter.

Economic outlook: Holds a treasured triple-A credit rating. On course for a continued boom.

becoming a citizen within three years. UK credentials often readily accepted.

Climate: Warm in summer, with cool evenings. Cold winters and heavy snowfall.

Economic outlook: In a downturn but expected to rebound strongly next year on the back of oil prices, technology and construction.

employment laws are also less stringent.

Climate: Hot and sunny every day and sweltering in summer. Rain is rare.

Economic outlook: One of the fastest-growing countries in the region.

Alberta, Canada

Backwoods image but immigrants make up a large part of a rising population of 3.6 million. Bottom end of the labour market has tightened but skills go a long way. Need for police officers and health care professionals. Possibility of



Qatar

Rapidly becoming the Gulf state of choice for expats seeking a quieter, family-orientated alternative to Dubai.

Strong banking sector is pulling in financial workers. Though many expats prefer the more liberal environments of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where the

Hamilton, New Zealand

The butt of jokes from other Kiwis, this North Island city is becoming a popular choice. Pastoral farming, horse breeding and food processing are major industries. Some of NZ's best wines made here. Despite being in recession for 18 months, NZ has a skills shortages and is consistently rated by UK expats as the best place in the world to live in terms of quality of life, standard of living and costs.

Climate: Temperate and damp. High rainfall. Warm summers.

Economic outlook: A bit uncertain, but forecast for recovery this year.

