

HUMOUR

Will you feel at home in Australia?

It depends on where you're from in SA, says recent returnee Richard Asher

AUSTRALIA. HOW WE LOVED TO LOATHE IT.

Especially on match days. I remember cursing every straw I clutched at as Warnie piled up Protea wickets while I fought my drooping eyelids at half-past way-past-my-bedtime. And I recall that sick feeling after I slipped out of work to watch the Boks lose 49-0. What had we ever done to them?

Things have changed, thank the gods. Warnie now terrorises poker tables (you're not Australian if you don't gamble, and by golly, Shane is nothing if not Australian) while Wallaby rugby has gone to the dogs. But that contempt we once held is never far away. It's fuelled by familiarity. You see, we're a lot like our Aussie brethren.

Each year around 100 000 people permanently migrate to Australia, many risking a demise aboard rickety sieves bound for Christmas Island. South African migrants, typically classed as 'highly skilled', tend not to arrive this way. But they are many: at last count, SA was one of Australia's top ten feeder countries. The point is that we (and others) find a lot to like about Australia.

If you wish to know why Australia is such a utopia, you need only corner these Saffer expats. They will harrumph about how terrifying life was on the golf estate back in Jo'burg, then pontificate about how they can now walk unmolested on the beach. It can be nauseating listening to these folk who must at all costs justify their move.

Here's a view from a not-highly-skilled-enough-to-migrate Saffer just returned from nine months roaming down under. Crime exists: neither biker gangs nor Sydney's western suburbs are to be messed with. Food is primitive: the average Aussie does not eat in the star-studded gourmet restaurants of Sydney. And, shamefully, Australians do not make braai fires; they switch on gas cookers.

More reasons why I could take or leave Australia? Many of its ultra-narrow highways are in a worse state than ours. And, Aussies are a bit like Americans: they don't get sarcastic humour.



Richard Asher

can take or leave Saffers' Paradise



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Architecture? The typical house is a boxy, squat affair. As for tasteful public buildings, get back to me when you can name one that isn't an anomalous cluster of giant oyster shells on Sydney harbour. Those famous meat pies? They're great if you don't mind cardboard for pastry. Just remember how this nation began: UK council-estate overflow. Do you still want to go?

Yes? Well then, you need to choose a city. Somewhere that reminds you of home, perhaps? If that's Gauteng, brace yourself, because nearly all Australia's major settlements are coastal. If you must have a mine dump in view, then Broken Hill in New South Wales will work. But it's a tiny place with no shopping malls. For a reminder of Sandton, you want the giant Westfield centres of Melbourne or Sydney.

You're better off if you're from Kimberley, because Australia has a parched, inland city of similar size for you - complete with a giant pit. Fly to Perth, drive east for six hours and Kalgoorlie's your aunty.

Are you from Bloemfontein? You might be happiest in Canberra, the nation's purpose-built capital. The only inland city of any real size, you can expect the extreme temperatures of home. What will be an eye-opener for traditional Vrystaters will be the legal brothels that keep all those politicians entertained.

Durbanites are blessed with a like-for-like alternative in sub-tropical Brisbane, capital of the sunburnt, unshaven state of Queensland (back in the day, convicts too nasty for New South Wales were sent back here). Just like in KZN, warm clothing is rarely required and the surfing is so good they've called one spot Surfers Paradise. And should you miss the wildlife from home, the late Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo - now complete with an impressive mini-savannah and African big game - is just up the road.

If you're from the Windy City, consider Adelaide. It's got the same colonial English echoes PE does, and a similar climate. It's a place where those accustomed to ridicule from bigger-city people will get their fix, and it even has salt diggings just out of town.

Capetonians have it tough, because they have choices. It depends what aspect of Cape Town life you want to recreate. Both Sydney and Melbourne will do if you want coffee, restaurants and a culture scene that buzzes. If you want a strong sense of superiority over other cities, Melbourne edges it. But if any of Cape Town's world-famous waterfront, glamour beaches or gay scene are important to you, choose Sydney.

You may even tolerate some of the Saffer expats... just take their stories with a pinch of braai salt. ☺