



Wish You Were Here... *Forever?*

Tempted to turn that sun-soaked holiday into a permanent lifestyle? Lucille Howe reveals the reality behind the dream

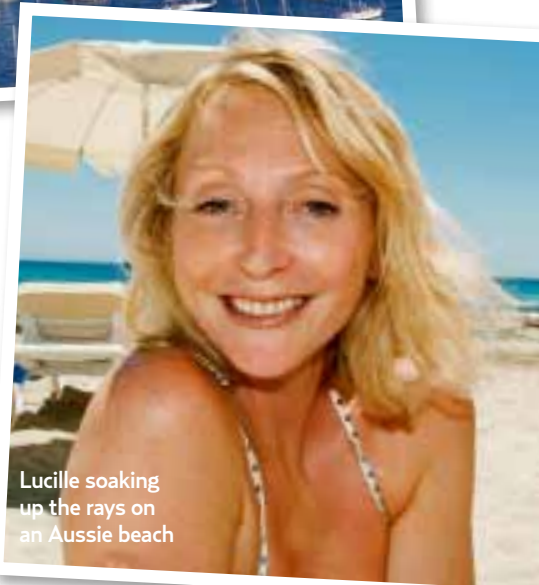
TRAVEL. WHAT HAS IT MEANT TO you? Until recently, it probably meant much the same to me... escapism, adventure. Ideally, you could add tan lines, shopping and romance to that list. But what I never figured out, even after visiting every continent by my late twenties, is that returning home is the greatest pleasure of all.

After one particular holiday to Australia – the Promised Land, with bronzed bodies, white sand and epic skies – I was hooked, convinced that upping sticks to live there for a few years was the route to happiness.

Such a massive move seems a big deal in retrospect, but once I set the plan in

motion, it had its own momentum. I put my flat up for rent, gave notice at my job as a writer in London, sent my CV to potential employers... and got myself to the gym.

Was it worth it? Boy, was it. Like most of the Brits in Sydney, I decamped to iconic Bondi Beach. The exchange rate was magnanimous. Where else could you rent a chic, glass-fronted apartment just three cartwheels and a lazy jog from one kilometre of heaven? And the food. You couldn't walk three steps without falling over a juice bar or an organic deli. Sunday brunch was an institution, and more friends were made over eggs Benedict than in years of university. *{continued}*



Lucille soaking up the rays on an Aussie beach



Celebrating New Year's Eve Sydney style

Eventually, I got sponsored as features editor on a well-known magazine. It meant a shift from my working holiday visa to a '457', which bought me four years in my job and the country. I'd got my flip-flop well and truly in the door. And, as luck would have it, I fell in love too.

Phil was a creative director at an advertising agency and a morning and weekend surfer. And he was ridiculously hot (girls would ask to feel his ripped stomach at parties).

For three years, life was perfect. What started as a casual fling with a country became a full-blown love affair. In contrast to the easy-breezy pace of Bondi, my relationship with Phil was developing fast. The 'seize the moment' attitude of life overseas extended to love and we were refreshingly free of the game-playing where you're loath to commit in case something better shows up.

But as my body became tauter, my brain got slacker. I craved the cultural and intellectual stimulation of home that was sadly lacking in my new-found paradise. Back in England, if I was feeling down, I would immerse myself in a deep conversation about the future of feminism over a bottle of rosé with my old university friends before dissecting our past romances. In Australia, conversations with new friends lacked the depth I'd been used to. They centred on new

miracle beach-body diets and fitness crazes that gave you great abs. At one dinner party, a guest received a round of applause for having run up the steep incline of Heartbreak Hill. I dutifully clapped my hands while feeling like I'd had a lobotomy.

I missed my sister, Emily. We were five years apart but best friends. I missed the no-frills honesty from my brother, the sage life advice from my dad and the home cooking from my mum. I longed for the British sense of humour, even the rain. If Phil and I were going to settle down and start a family, I wanted my parents and siblings to be part of that. Phil didn't want to leave his sunny paradise, arguing that I'd known that all along. And so I was faced with having to make the biggest decision of my life: leave a great relationship to come home.

I felt the sickening sadness of walking familiar steps for the last time – the climb to the lighthouse where Phil and I held each other tightly. The last morning slice of banana bread and chai latte as we watched the surf. I hailed a taxi and left Phil waving from the pavement, trying not to break down.

Back in London, my initial elation turned to panic as I realised my old life had gone. During the years I'd been 'finding myself' abroad, my friends had met soulmates and had children. I tried to meet up with a great friend who was a new

SHOULD YOU MOVE ABROAD?

First ask yourself these questions, advises life coach Jessica Rogers

1 Is your desire to travel a desire to escape?

If life abroad seems to be a solution to financial, relationship, family or work issues, these are likely to resurface in a new home.

2 What lies beneath the travel fantasy?

Life abroad can be linked to an idealised version of ourselves in a dream location. But unhealthy habits or low confidence won't be fixed by a new life in the sun. Work on your issues in the here and now.

3 Is wanderlust just boredom?

Could a few small changes transform your life for the better? Evaluate your relationship, take an evening class... You might find satisfaction on your doorstep.

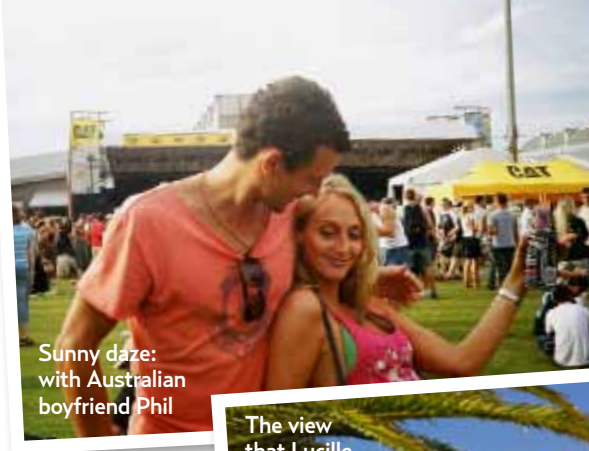
4 Would you suit life abroad?

How would you feel having to start again in a new job market or living in a different time zone and rarely seeing family?

5 Where do you see yourself in five years?

Write down your long-term goals and ask yourself whether a trip is likely to bring them closer.

For more details, visit jessicavrogers.co.uk



Sunny daze: with Australian boyfriend Phil

The view that Lucille left behind



mum. 'Let's put a date in for June,' she told me. It was March. Another had upped sticks to the country with her long-term boyfriend and suggested I

make the two-hour trip for Sunday lunch. 'There's a party on Saturday night?' I said. 'We're having a quiet night in,' she replied.

I didn't realise it then, but I'd missed an important window. I wished I hadn't travelled so far in search of happiness when the simple pleasures had been there all along.

Relationships you have while abroad are protected by a bubble of idealism. If you hook up with a 'native' guy, you find yourself laughing at your own jokes as cultural references go over their head. Remember The Stone Roses? He won't – they never made it past the shores of England. Plus, old friends won't be able to vet him in the way they need to.

My job situation had suffered, too. People I used to know had moved, were on maternity leave or struggled to remember me. And without Phil I felt lost. Memories came at a price. This summer he is getting married. His baby daughter will watch.

So, for the time being, I'm putting down some roots of my own. I have a very new boyfriend. It's early days but he's smart and sexy and makes my heart beat faster. He knows all about the pros and cons of crossing continents. This summer we'll holiday in Italy but it's improving our tennis game in the local park that has us most excited. I've been pottering around my little flat in East Dulwich, framing photographs that have been in storage, planting a window box and stringing up some lanterns. But, most importantly, I'm keeping my passport in the drawer and reminding myself that 'There's no place like home'. ■