

# *We took* **THE LEAP!**

Many of us dream of upping sticks and creating a new life. We talk to two women who have done just that



in my experience



Amy, Rob and the kids enjoy time at the beach and with local wildlife



## 'I'VE FULFILLED MY CHILDHOOD DREAM OF LIVING IN AUSTRALIA'

**Amy Frain, 41, her husband Rob, 41, and their children Lily, seven, and George, three, recently relocated 9,000 miles from Southport in Merseyside to Perth, Australia.**

When I was a child, most other kids chose the USA or Africa for school geography projects, but I always chose Australia. I was fascinated by this far-off land that had incredible wildlife and barbecues on a sunny beach at Christmas.

I often returned to that image during my hour-long commute from my home in Southport to a school in Manchester, in the cold and dark at 7am. As high school teachers, Rob and I were spending increasingly less time with our own children. We were arriving home at 6.30pm and spending 30 minutes with the kids before putting them to bed. We were also working at home in the evening and at weekends and had no work-life balance.

In 2013, we visited friends in Perth. We'd been to Australia before but this time the sunshine, beautiful beaches and relaxed lifestyle led to us dreaming of living there. It was a slow burn but in 2019 we decided we had nothing to lose by

registering our expression of interest for a visa, so we could teach there. It took four years to get our visas, then one early morning in September 2023, Rob shouted, 'Check your email. Check your email!' I looked and was stunned. Our visas had been granted.

We were so excited, but also in shock. 'How on earth am I going to tell my sister?' I thought. I was nervous about leaving my secure job of 19 years and telling my students that

*'We're spending much more time together as a family'*

I was leaving. George, then two, was too young to understand, whereas Lily was both excited and sad to leave her friends, grandparents and cousins. I reminded her of all the amazing wildlife she'd see in Australia and that she could go to the beach every day. Her school helped by doing work on Australia, and the Australian cartoon *Bluey* was an absolute blessing.

By August 2024, everything was in place to make our 9,000 mile move to the other side of the world. Rob, an IT teacher, had secured a job at a college, friends had offered to host us until we found a house, and removal company John Mason were booked in to ship our belongings to Australia. >>





in my experience


## *Laid-back lifestyle*

The day we left, on 16 August, came with many mixed emotions. My dad came to see us off. I was a broken mess at the final goodbyes, but he reassured me that he was only a phone call away. 'Go and give Australia everything you've got,' he said. 'If it doesn't work out, there's always a home for you here.' In the taxi to Heathrow airport, I cried on and off all the way. The children were excited and saw it as a big adventure.

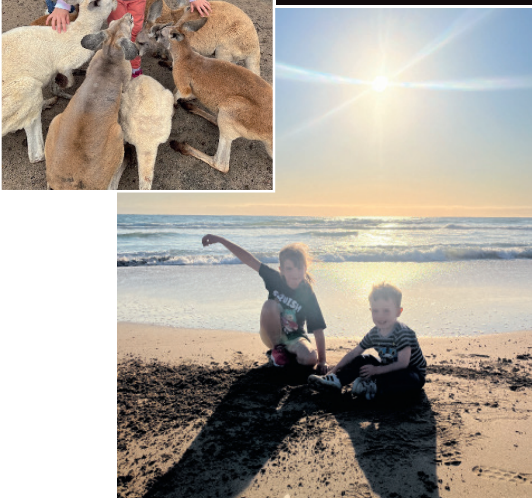
We have now lived in Australia for six months and absolutely love it. We're earning almost double what we were in the UK and have lots more free time.

The kids adore seeing the colourful birds and the kangaroos. Life is more laid-back. Since arriving, I got a PE teacher role at Rob's college, so we travel to work together. Our workday finishes earlier, so at the end of the day we go to the beach. We're spending much more time together as a family.

We plan to stay in Australia but as we are still living with our friends, our next focus is getting our own house with a pool like we promised Lily. We stay in contact with friends and family through Facetime and messages, and one of Lily's friends is now a penpal. A number of friends and family are saving up to visit. As a child, I'd never have believed that one day I'd be calling Australia home – but dreams can come true.



**Lily and George see their new life, including kangaroos, as a big adventure!**



## *'LEAVING LONDON FOR WALES WAS LIFE-CHANGING'*

**Ali Gillow, 60, lives with her partner Dan Fishel, 67, and their three alpacas Ned, Toffee and Griffin, in Corwen, Denbighshire**

Like all my family and friends, I'd only ever lived in London, and never envisaged moving away from the city I called home. Driven by ambition, I'd been successful in my careers in banking recruitment and property management. On the face of it, I had it all. A flat in fashionable Belsize Park, gym membership and an exciting social life dining in the finest restaurants. However, work had been my life and it had left no time for a relationship or children. My days were a whirlwind of early starts and pressurised long workdays. By 6pm on a Friday, I was exhausted.

Nevertheless, I'd jump in the car and drive an hour to the south coast to go sailing for the weekend. While my colleagues were spending their bonuses on designer handbags, I would spend mine on sailing or saving to go on trekking holidays.

In 2013, I met Dan, a primary school teacher and musician, through online dating.

He was so different to me. While I was immersed in finance and property, he was teaching young children and playing jazz trombone. When I told him one day that I had to 'bike some keys' to a landlord I was dealing with at work, his reply was 'but you don't have a bike!' Nothing in the world of education was ever so urgent that you'd need a





Ali and Dan own three alpacas and grow their own vegetables



motorbike courier!

However, there was clearly a strong connection. We had our own flats, but three years into the relationship we decided to look for somewhere together that we could enjoy at weekends. I wanted a property within an hour of London, but the prices were too high. Waking up on Christmas Day in 2015, in North Wales, where we were staying to be near Dan's family in Liverpool, I suggested buying a holiday house there. 'I've been waiting for you to say that,' Dan smiled.

We returned in March to view some properties. The estate agent told us that he had a house in mind that we'd love, but it didn't go on sale until the following month, so we couldn't do a viewing. However, I didn't need to see inside. We both fell for the beautiful stone-built house immediately. Situated at the top of a valley overlooking the Berwyn Mountains, it was stunning. There was no question: we would buy it.

'Ty Cerrig' became our retreat from London life, a picture-perfect place to escape to for some peace and quiet. Dan lived there permanently from about six months after we bought it, while I commuted back and forth for work.

When in March 2020 we could see that a Covid lockdown was imminent, I went to my office, packed everything into my car and made the five-hour journey to lock down in Wales. The unexpected opportunity to spend more time there proved to be life-changing. I never left.

When I told my London friends that I wouldn't be returning to the city, they all thought I was mad. However, I was the happiest I'd ever been in Wales. I loved the air and even the weather. Life slowed down. Now, my mornings start waiting for the kettle to boil on an Aga while competing against Dan at Wordle. In London, I had to be within a stone's throw of a shop, but now it's a 30-minute drive to a supermarket. The

only time we get stuck in traffic is when there's a flock of sheep in the lane!

### *Change for the better*

We now grow our own vegetables to cook for dinner and make jams, chutneys, bread and elderflower wine with ingredients from the garden. I weave baskets and even joined the WI. At one meeting, a local alpaca farmer gave a talk about keeping alpacas and it inspired me to get my own. I'm now the



proud owner of Ned, Toffee and Griffin. They always put a smile on my face.

In 2022, the barn conversion next to our house went up for sale. We decided to buy it to rent it out in addition to the cottage that was on our land, which led us to setting up AliDan Holiday Cottages. Guests often arrive fraught after the long drive from London, and go home feeling floaty and rejuvenated.

Sometimes in the summer, I'll sit in the field with Ned, Toffee and Griffin. I reflect on how much my life has changed for the better. Although I wish I'd made the move sooner, I'm still very grateful for the life I had in London as it enabled me to finally find my true self here.

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