

OUT YONDER

SWAPPING THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE FOR WIDE OPEN SPACES, FOUR AUSSIES SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES OF MOVING TO THE COUNTRY.

WORDS AS TOLD TO RACHEL WHITE



Madelin Hayes at Hearson Cove, Murujuga National Park. **FACING PAGE, FROM TOP** Karratha's mesmerising landscapes; Tidepole Island or 'Sam's Island' sits just off the Dampier foreshore; Karratha's ancient wonders.

Madelin Hayes

KARRATHA, WA

A yearning for more and a love of travel led Perth reporter Madelin Hayes to a life of adventure in the Pilbara, WA.

"I GUESS I HAD A BIT of a quarter-life crisis," says Pilbara reporter Madelin Hayes, 26. "I'm a Perth girl originally. I lived and worked there throughout my early 20s, writing for a section of the *Sunday Times* called *Outdoor Explorer*. It was very behind-the-desk work. I was writing about these incredible places that I'd never actually seen for myself. So, midway through 2024, I did some solo travel around Europe and Morocco, and when I got back, I decided to give regional journalism a crack.

"I love telling regional yarns, and I would often cover the Pilbara for *Outdoor Explorer*. I always thought, 'Gosh, I'd love to live there one day', and who knows, maybe I manifested it because I started chatting to a few editors in Perth and now I'm up here alone covering this whole big patch of the Pilbara – from Exmouth through to Port Hedland. It's a big responsibility, but it's been such an adventure so far, and I'm glad I did it.

"I moved in September 2024 and live in a company house in Karratha, so being able to escape on weekends is a real highlight for me. There are so many beautiful, untouched places up here. The islands out near Dampier, which is about 20 minutes from Karratha, are especially amazing. People here have shacks on the islands so they can go and stay, it's very relaxed and easygoing. I've definitely made friends with a few people who have boats!

"You really feel like you're away from the world in Karratha, which is amazing, but at times I've felt far away from family and friends, too. I no longer underestimate the power of calling home and touching base with people, because if you're thinking about them, they're likely thinking about you, too. But I've also seen how lovely and welcoming people can be, especially when they find out I'm here by myself. People are always like, 'Come to netball, or join this club, or come for dinner', so that's been great.

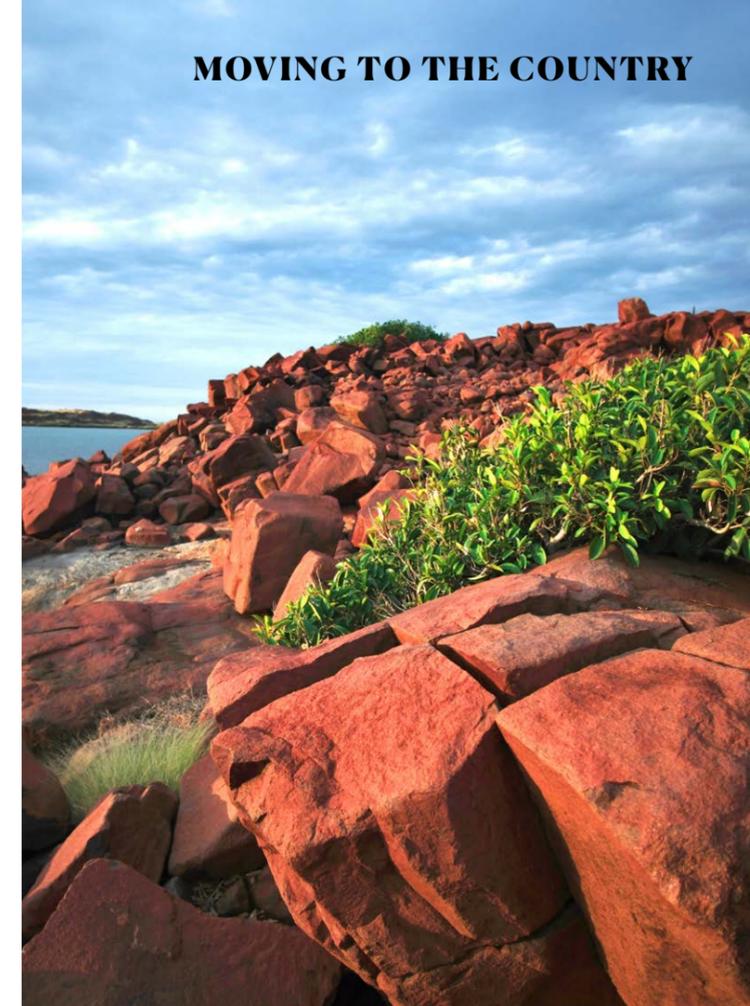
"I've been pleasantly surprised by how much is available in terms of sporting clubs and hobbies up here. There's a really cute arts centre in town, and on Thursday nights and Saturday mornings they do pottery classes, so I've been getting into that.

"In Perth, my weekends were spent catching up with the girls for a coffee or brekkie, or a nice meal in the evening, but you find new ways to spend your weekends up here. I've really enjoyed finding more ways to be creative.

"I'm not sure if Karratha will be my home forever, but the lifestyle here is amazing. The thing I love most about living here is that I get to write stories about everyday people doing really cool things. Country people are so humble about what they do – they often don't realise they are doing incredible things. That's the beauty of the country and telling country stories."

Follow @maddihayes__ on Instagram. >

PHOTOGRAPHY ADOBE STOCK, ALAMY, TOURISM AUSTRALIA





Louisa Deasey
TRENTHAM, VIC

Escaping Melbourne for Trentham, Vic, has given author Louisa Deasey an appreciation for everyday delights.

“THE EXTENDED LOCKDOWNS in Melbourne in 2020 and 2021 made living in the city extremely claustrophobic,” says writer Louisa Deasey, 48. “Something psychological happened during that time; so many people came out of it needing a massive change. For me, the city seemed 10 times louder than it had before COVID, probably because everyone was going out more than ever before. I had this sense that someone was looking in the window at me all the time, talking to me, and interrupting me because of the noise and movement in the city. I hadn’t realised I wasn’t able to write.

“In September 2022, I took my cat and went to Castlemaine to house-sit for friends. I couldn’t believe how peaceful I felt, I had the best sleep I’d had in months, and I was creative. On the drive back to Melbourne, I thought, ‘OK, I’m going to keep this peacefulness for as long as I can’, but it was literally within an hour of getting back to my apartment in North Fitzroy that my heart rate went up again. I thought, ‘I’ve gotta get out of here’. That was October 1, and I moved to Trentham, in Central West Victoria, on November 5.

“Initially, I thought I’d move to where my friends were in Castlemaine, but I couldn’t find a place, and actually I’m glad I couldn’t find anything there because Trentham is beautiful. Something I used to think about the country was that people wanted to know what you’re doing all the time, but here the people are so lovely, and I never get the sense that I’m being spied on. What people care about here is whether you’ve got enough wood and if you’re warm enough at home. No-one asks intrusive questions; I feel like everyone’s got space to do their own thing. But it is true that in the country you need to know your neighbours because nature runs the show out here, and you rely on each other.

“My boyfriend, Sam, still lives in Melbourne. Sometimes I really miss him and wish he lived here, but mostly I have the best of both worlds. During the week, I love working from home in my office, where I can write without interruption. Then when Sam or my family comes up to stay, I appreciate seeing them so much more and can give them more attention, too. In the city, I was always distracted. On weekends, Sam helps me with the woodchopping, we love bringing the wood in because there’s a wood fire here and we’ve grown to love the simple things, like home cooking. I didn’t realise how much I wanted to live like this until I came here.”

Visit louisadeasey.com or follow @louisadeasey

Julie Hancock
WELLINGTON, NSW

A coincidental meeting led Julie Hancock from Sydney’s Eastern Suburbs to a sheep farm in the NSW Central West.

“I MET PETE WHEN WE WENT TO UNIVERSITY together 40 years ago,” says Julie Hancock, 61. “Our worlds collided back then, but we were just friends. We reconnected coincidentally 10 years ago. I was very much an Eastern Suburbs native, and he was a sheep farmer from Wellington, NSW, but we were in our early 50s by then and I do think it was a matter of timing for us both. I don’t know if I could’ve made the move in my 20s, 30s or even 40s, but it came at the right point in my life, and I love it. I’m very happy here.

“Pete’s wife passed away when his little girls were five and six. When we re-met, the girls were 11 and 12, and at boarding school in Mittagong. So, when we got together, we had this triangle long-distance relationship between Sydney, Wellington and Mittagong. We did that for four years and then COVID hit when I was up in Wellington for the weekend. Pete said, ‘You know if you go home, you probably won’t be able to come back anytime soon’, so that prompted the move. When COVID calmed down, I realised I didn’t want to move back.

“I’m very fortunate because Pete’s a fifth-generation Wellington farmer; his roots here are very deep and he’s got some amazing friends and family, all of whom welcomed me with open arms. And even though it wasn’t like I moved here knowing no-one, Pete told me the best way to be happy in a small country town is to join a community group. I’d always been interested in amateur theatre, so I joined the

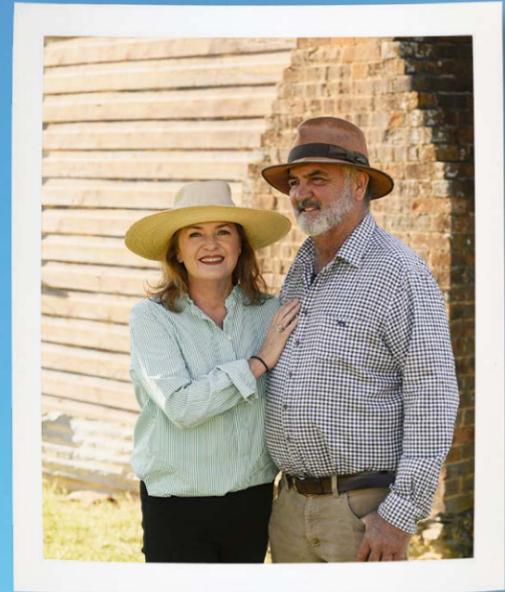
Wellington Amateur Theatrical Society. A year later, I was the president and director.

“I’m also the self-nominated first lady of the Wellington Race Club, because Pete’s the president, and I’m on the committee of the newly formed Twelve Mile Feast for Relief. We’re holding a paddock-to-plate feast on the 5th of July to aid communities in flood-affected South West Queensland. I still work three days a week in media sales at Triple M in Dubbo, and we have two cottages in town that we’ve restored and now rent as holiday accommodation: Percy Street Gallery Cottages. Honestly, I thought I’d have more spare time living in the country, but I’m busier than I’ve ever been!

“I must admit I go to Sydney for my GP and dentist; the rural health crisis is a real thing. The GP here is a lovely man in his 70s who has devoted his life to being a country doctor, but you literally can’t see him for three or four months, so that’s been challenging. I’m fortunate enough to have a choice... a lot of people don’t have that luxury.

“More than anything, I feel very lucky. I didn’t have children, so meeting someone with two girls [Alex and Edwina, now 22 and 20] means I’ve gotten to experience that. I’ve never tried to replace their mother, but we’re great friends, and I just feel really lucky that this happened to me and I got this chance at an amazing life.”

Visit percycottages.com or @twelve_mile_ on Instagram >



CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP Louisa Deasey has embraced the slower pace in rural Victoria; High Street stores in Trentham; The Cosmopolitan Hotel was built in 1866; the cosy interior of the ‘Cosmo’ Hotel; spectacular Trentham Falls.



PHOTOGRAPHY ROBERT GRAY, ROBERT BLACKBURN, SHARON LAPKIN, BONNIE BRIEN, DESTINATION NSW, VISIT VICTORIA



Lake Burrendong – or ‘The Dam’ to locals – in Wellington is a popular spot for water sports and fishing. INSET Julie Hancock with her partner, Pete Barton, who runs sheep on his 3200-hectare property.

Tanya Barbariol BANGALOW, NSW

Florist Tanya Barbariol returns to her roots in the Northern Rivers, NSW, after almost a decade in Sydney's Inner West.

"GROWING UP, I ALWAYS LIVED in small towns and communities across the Northern Rivers and Tweed Coast, whereas my husband, Matteo, was born and bred in the city," says Tanya Barbariol, 34. "I went to Sydney for what was supposed to be a month or two when I was 21, but I ended up meeting Matteo and stayed for nine years. We moved back in mid-2022 with our son, Oscar. We now live in the village of Bangalow on a quarter-acre block.

"Moving here has been the easiest thing because we really connected with this place. Barely any of the people we know here are actually from here, so there's a strong sense of community because we've all chosen to live in Bangalow for the same reason. In the city, I felt like a lot of the time you were passing people by; I chatted to people all the time and had social friendships, but it never really felt like a deep community connection, and that was a big thing for us.

"We love having a more outdoorsy lifestyle. We're always at the beach, or in the countryside visiting waterfalls and rainforests, and it's not a special occasion or weekend-only thing. Being able to do these things just as a part of our life is huge for us. These days, I never go to Woolies or Coles – I get all our groceries from farmers' markets or an amazing local delivery service that delivers to our door, direct from local growers... all the produce is so amazing and fresh.

"Because we have young kids – Oscar is four and Luca is nine months old – living on the outskirts of town works well for us. We can walk into town for a coffee and still have elements of city life, but we also have our space – it's the best of both worlds. As the kids get a bit older, I think we'll want to move further out of town, to have a bit more land, but for now, we're happy to have the 'small country town' vibe without actually living on a property.

"The funniest thing, for me, is that people assume some services, like the post, would be delayed, but because we've chosen such a well-connected area, I'd say if anything it's the opposite. I started my business, Oh Flora, over 10 years ago in Sydney, but I often travelled to country destinations for events and weddings. So, when we moved up here, it wasn't a difficult transition as I was already known for destination floral event design and experiences.

"I would say access to supply is more of a challenge, now I have to source from several different farms. But on the upside, I have my own garden and access to a sunny patch on a friend's property just five minutes up the road, which is a dream come true! Matteo is planting a small vineyard right next to my flowers, so when the boys get a little bigger, we hope to grow both flowers and vines biodynamically." *CB*
Visit ohflora.com.au or follow @ohflorastudio

"We love having a more outdoorsy lifestyle. We're always at the beach, or in the countryside visiting waterfalls and rainforests."

MOVING TO THE COUNTRY

Tanya and Matteo Barbariol with sons Luca and Oscar at their garden patch on a friend's property up the road. **FACING PAGE** Rolling hills as far as the eye can see... beautiful Bangalow offers an idyllic family lifestyle.



PHOTOGRAPHY: LISA COHEN; JAMIE GREEN; DESTINATION NSW