

CULTURE SHOCK

In 2008, Claire Calvey left south Galway with her husband and four children and headed for Abu Dhabi with the idea of living abroad for a year or two. When the recession hit a few weeks later, Claire and her family had no option but to stay put. Last year, they took the plunge and decided to return home to Ireland for good.



"I recall little from my days as an anthropology student other than the 'pound-a-pint' nights out, dozens of missed lectures and an overwhelming sense that intellectually, I wasn't quite up to the job. However, I do recall studying the five stages of Culture Shock, a topic which turned out to be quite relevant to my life.

Landing in a new country can be overwhelming and there are many 'we're not in Kansas anymore' moments to negotiate before the newly arrived can fully integrate with the host culture.

I don't think I ever got beyond the 'negotiation stage' in the UAE since the melting pot of languages and cultures lead to a lot of misunderstanding, hostility and quite often, hilarity. One day I walked into a grocery store to discover the shopkeeper stretched out across the freezer, snoozing away. Clearing my throat, I stood and waited for a couple of minutes listening to his gentle snores before accepting defeat and continuing on my search of a pint of milk elsewhere.

Likewise in Australia, there were also things I simply could never get used to – not least the notion of summer being winter, autumn being spring and Christmas being the hottest time of year. A

Christmas day
barbecue
on the

beach might be a novelty in your first year but the following year you'll be fantasising about sub-zero temperatures and hot Gluhwein at the Eyre Square Christmas Market.

But what about Re-Entry Shock, the process by which one reintegrates back into their old life?

Returning home last year – with two extra children – felt a little like the end of an adventure. Snap, back to reality, AND back to square one.

The most striking thing about returning home is realising that apart from yourself, nothing has really changed. Our home seems smaller, our local Londis has been extended and now has an organic wine section, but overall, everything is as it was.

Except of course it's not. Living abroad changes you forever. I'm very different to the woman who boarded that Abu Dhabi flight in 2008. I'm less naïve, more cynical, and much braver. The world looks very different to me now – and to my children.

And nobody is remotely interested in hearing about your adventures abroad – sure aren't you here now! You're no longer an expat, you're just the same as everyone else, a notion which is both dismaying and comforting in equal measure.

Ireland, it's good to be back...

Follow Claire's new journey each month in **GALWAYnow** as she adapts back to life and living in the west.