

Top tips for a happy retirement abroad

By Neil Bowie, Relocation Consultant

Retiring overseas is an exciting and attractive proposition for many people, with the numbers of people leaving the UK to retire in sunnier climates increasing every year. The allure of a better climate, or a better quality of life abroad can make retiring abroad very appealing.

Whether you want to spend your retirement enjoying sunnier weather, fulfilling a desire to join other family members who've already moved overseas, or see retirement as the chance to start a new adventure, exploring new places and experiencing new hobbies or interests; in order to have a successful retirement relocation, there are some crucial things to research and consider before you set off to enjoy your twilight years overseas. Neil Bowie, Relocation Consultant at Crown Relocations, has put together some practical tips to help you along your way.

Do the research

Time is a luxury that many people don't have in abundance when it comes to relocating, but the more time you can put aside to do some research, the better. Whilst the thought might be off-putting, it will pay dividends later on and help you to avoid mistakes.

Consider what you would set-up if you moved house in the UK, such as a phone line, utilities and council tax, and find out what information you will be required to provide in order to do this in your new location.

If you are using relocation specialists, your representative will be able to advise you accordingly and direct you to informative websites. Otherwise you should be able to find out more details and legal requirements from government and service provider websites.

Property in the UK

If you decide to keep your property in the UK and it is going to be empty or rented out, you will need to let your mortgage lender and insurance providers know. You would also need to declare any income from rent to HM Revenue & Customs.

If you intend to leave your property empty while you are away, you will need to make sure that it is secure. It's advisable to give the Land Registry an address where you can be contacted abroad, as empty properties or those with tenants can be targeted by fraudsters.

Informing institutions

Your local Council's council tax department and electoral registration unit will need to know when you are leaving and a forwarding address. You will also need to inform banks, building societies or any financial institution that you have a policy or agreement with that you are moving abroad. With prior arrangement, the Post Office will re-direct your mail to another address so that you don't miss out on any vital

correspondence.

Pensions and Finances

It is important to know that you will be comfortable financially in your retirement. Pensioners who retire abroad need to manage their finances and be able to have a comfortable living from their savings and pension income in another country's economy. Before you go you will need to check the status of any funds from pensions, whether you will still be able to access them in the country that you are retiring to, and whether you will benefit from any incremental increases to UK pensions.

For those retiring abroad, there are a number of options available to maximise your existing UK pension overseas. A financial adviser would be able to advise on what the best course of action would be. Seeking financial advice is incredibly important as there are a number of financial products and pensions schemes available to expatriate retirees that you might not otherwise be aware of.

Tax

Different countries have different laws and taxes on property and income. To avoid any financial surprises, you should get detailed financial advice, so that you fully understand your tax obligations to both the country that you are leaving and the country that you are repatriating to. A financial adviser can also inform you about the benefits of offshore banking, as this could reduce your tax liability depending on where you are living.

HM Revenue & Customs can also provide information and advice about your tax liability on any income over the UK personal allowance. UK tax payable from abroad can vary depending on where you decide to live.

Health

It is important to find out about your health and welfare rights abroad; some UK benefits are not payable outside the UK, others apply only in the EU or in countries which have agreements with the UK. You should also find out about healthcare costs in the country you want to move to and take out health insurance if appropriate to cover private medical and dental treatment, as well as medical repatriation to the UK. Your GP, dentist and other relevant health practitioners will also need to be informed of your relocation.

Finding local places of interest

Locating places in advance that you will need to visit once you have arrived, such as a supermarket, can be a great time and stress saver. It would be worthwhile marking them on a map so that you can find your way around when you're out and about. Crucially, it also means you won't need to rely on the internet when you arrive. After all, it could take some time to organise phone lines and internet access for your new home.

This is also a useful way to help you establish elements of your current lifestyle that you wish to continue, such as keeping fit, attending clubs and societies, theatre or restaurants. Doing the activities that you are used to will help you to avoid feeling

homesick. If you do find yourself feeling down or disillusioned about the relocation, try to be realistic about the issues you are facing and don't stay at home, instead join social clubs and organisations where you will meet like minded people. Find places you enjoy and establish routines that will work for you.

Learn about your new country

It is perfectly natural to experience culture shock when you arrive so it can be very beneficial to prepare yourself for those differences. You may think that some countries have similar cultures to the UK, but that doesn't mean you won't feel the effects of culture shock. No matter how alike the countries are, it can often help to take part in an intercultural training course to get a true understanding of the new culture.

The more you know about your new surroundings the better placed you will be to connect with the locals and understand the way the country is governed. If you can, visiting your new location before you move will also help you to know what to expect.

Go explore

Once you are over the jet lag, you will undoubtedly be excited and full of enthusiasm about your new destination. You really should harness this energy as much as possible - now is the time to get your map out and explore the local area. This will immediately give you a sense of where you are, which will help to build your feelings of comfort and familiarity. It will also give you ideas of where you can take friends and family when they come to visit you.

Finding the perfect pad

You will feel more settled if you have somewhere to call your own, but that doesn't mean you need to buy a house! Simply find somewhere that you can use as a permanent base rather than relying on a hotel. Remember to take into account the local area when choosing your new home. Pick somewhere that has easy access to local amenities and allow time to familiarise yourself with the area before you purchase to check that it suits your lifestyle and how you get out and about.

Don't let distance keep you apart

Keeping in touch with loved ones back home can help to reduce the feeling of homesickness. Nowadays, there is a wide variety of low cost, quick and user-friendly ways to maintain contact.

The internet is a great way of keeping the cost of staying in touch down. Software such as Skype, allows you to phone people through the internet so you can make free calls for as long as you like and, if they have a webcam, you will be able to see whoever you're talking to. This is a great way of communicating with all family members; if your children or grandchildren already keep in touch with their friends over the internet, they would be able to help you to familiarise yourself with using different approaches keeping in contact before you move.

Social networking websites such as Facebook allow you to share photos, have live chats and catch up on what is happening back home. Make sure you keep your

profile up-to-date so your loved ones back home can see what you are up to and in turn, keep you posted on the latest from them.

Join expat groups

Investigate local expat groups and, when you arrive, make an effort to join as many as possible. The members of these groups can be a vital source of encouragement, practical assistance and information to help you settle in.

Expat groups can also be a great way to build your support network and make friends, which can be particularly important if you are in a country with a different first language to your own. Expats will be able to help you practice the language, as well as learn the local culture. What's more, you can use their experiences of local services, from dentists to tap classes, to find out the best places to use.

Remember - they have been through the same process as you and will therefore know and understand what you are going through, as well as the needs you might have. Don't be shy about asking for help.

Make it work for you

Simply put, there is nothing quite like research to set your relocation in the right direction; seek as much assistance as you can to help to ease the burden and get your friends and family involved in the process – they will be more than happy to help you get the best start you can.

Do more research and seek advice

Research is the key to a successful relocation, gather as much information and seek advice from specialists - forewarned is forearmed. For more ideas about what you should think about for your relocation, head to www.moveoverseas.co.uk/mymove for an interactive planner and get started on that to-do list!

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