

THE IRISH IN AUSTRALIA

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AUSTRALIAN WEATHER is undoubtedly one of the best things about the continent. On average, January is the hottest month of the year. Many summer days in Perth reach and exceed forty degrees Celsius. Although, the glorious summer days are often followed by muggy nights. Air conditioning units cool the room reducing sleep disruption. Many Australian winter days are a far cry from an Irish winter's day. On average, July is the coldest month with temperatures typically around fifteen to twenty degrees. Rainfall is also an entirely different experience; it doesn't rain many days of the year but often times it is too heavy to see well while driving. Apparently, due to the high temperatures, many houses are not insulated. This makes many winter nights excessively cold. Considering Christmas in Leitrim, it's all relative to the situation.

The glorious weather is a fantastic opportunity to explore the outdoors. Walk trails, cycle paths and outdoor boot camps are always nearby. The motivation to exercise due to free public facilities is greater. There are also parks, shopping centres and community centres with lots happening on every corner. Moving away from the city doesn't overly reduce the chances of accessing these facilities.

Job opportunities are more plentiful in Australia. The prospect of promotion is also greater with employers focusing on the dynamics of the team. One member may perform better with certain projects so the leader or job role will vary accordingly. The organisation of the team doesn't always stick to the same hierarchy. Therefore, many Irish are working in positions they wouldn't even get a look in at home. However, work is demanding and responsibilities regularly cause a lot of stress. Work hours are often long and expectation of performance frequently results in many days where the pressure is on.

Many couples living in Perth part from one another for four weeks at a time as a consequence of Fly In Fly Out (FIFO) employment. Employees fly to the mines, mostly in Australia's North West, for one month and return to the city for one week before going back for another month. This cycle is repeated for as long as a

person can take it. Many people work on Mines, in which they mainly excavate Iron Ore or drill for Oil and Gas. Individuals live in camps near their work. Camp facilities include canteens where breakfast, lunch and dinner are provided. Additionally, housekeepers clean the workers bedrooms; this includes changing bedclothes and towels. Evening activities typically comprise of going to the gym or socialising at the bar. However many camps have a four mid-strength drink limit. Conversely, there are two sides to every coin; being apart from your better half month after month is excruciatingly difficult. So why work FIFO? It is a short term sacrifice for long term financial gain. Many couples claim to have committed to FIFO for three years and saved enough money to buy or build a house mortgage free in Ireland.

Due to Australia's Mining culture, the cost of living in Perth is quite high compared with Leitrim. For instance, a taxi to and from a bar fifteen minutes away may cost \$70 return. A pint is \$10-\$15 and a Cocktail is roughly \$20. Therefore, an average night of drinking often exceeds \$200. Renting is also expensive; a couple is likely to pay \$400-\$500 a week on rent. Childcare centres typically charge \$500 a week for proving care and education for one child. A semi-detached house is likely to have a \$600,000 price tag. Many home loan lenders require five to twenty percent of the house price in cash before approving the mortgage. Therefore, for many, FIFO is a prerequisite to buying a home.

The infrastructure in Australia is much better compared with Leitrim. Potholes don't exist over here. The intricately designed layout of the land means a freeway or highway is rarely more than two minutes away. Transport timetables are very unlike Manorhamilton's schedule. Buses and trains run every few minutes making travelling on public transport efficient and convenient. There are two options to choose from when planning a day trip to Sligo with Bus Eireann.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2017) measured quality standards in education across forty one

economically advanced countries. Australia ranks third from the bottom in the assessment of quality education. Comparably, Ireland's children achieved a respectable place of thirteenth position. Several Irish children, me included, were educated in a one room school in which the same bionic teacher taught junior infants and sixth class simultaneously. Yet, Australian schools have staff coming out of their ears! Many Irish possibly assume that such a foreign exotic land would rank in the top end of the education league table not the bottom end. However, for some Irish living in Australia this may not be overly surprising as the gap between the rich and poor is wider than in Ireland.

The quality of life in Australia is greater than Leitrim's with respect to the number of bars and restaurants. People living in Australia are spoiled for choice while considering venues for dinner and drinks. Swan Valley is a wine region in Perth; it hosts many gorgeous restaurants and vineyards. However, in comparison to Manorhamilton, restaurants are more expensive; many dinner dates will set you back \$200-\$400. There are also lots of music festivals, food festivals and markets to brighten up the weekend if white sandy beaches aren't calling.

Australia may be the land of plenty with weather we dream about in Leitrim but it's not very sunny emotionally. Being away from our parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, friends and the craic is immensely difficult. The distance from home and the cost of going back including taking leave from work results in many people going eighteen months or more without seeing their loved ones. Several Irish in Australia have nieces and nephews they haven't met. Lots of Australians have their family close by and they depend on one another for support, we don't have that here. For many young Irish families, living in Australia without a family network can be problematic and challenging. However, as a result of mass emigration from Ireland, there are numerous people from Manorhamilton and Leitrim in general living nearby and we often call on one another for help, friendship and of course a wee bit of craic.