

O bring my terug ... **More and more SA expats just want to come home**

UK was the dream, but now South Africans are returning in record numbers

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HOMEWARD BOUND South African expat Haley van den Bergh is set to return home from the UK with her husband Neil and daughters Hannah and Rachael.

Image: Supplied

Haley van den Bergh has everything most South Africans dream off – free health care, unlimited water, world-class public transport, an efficient postal service,

affordable food and little crime.

But she is giving it all up to return to the country she left 10 years ago because she has no sense of belonging in the United Kingdom.

Van den Bergh is not alone. She is among scores of South Africans, including those skilled in health care, engineering, financial services and information technology, who have either returned home or are homeward bound.

Facebook group **Homeward Bound or Hoping**, which has more than 2,000 members, contains posts nearly every day by South Africans packing up their lives in the UK to head home.

While the UK has for years provided a lucrative spot for South Africans wanting better career prospects and a safer environment in which to raise their children, immigration figures reveal a decline in its appeal.

According to the UK's **Office for National Statistics** in 2015, about 4,000 South Africans left the country to return home – the highest in two years. 2016 statistics – its latest figures – showed about 500 South Africans returning home.

Homecoming Revolution – a company that helps South African expats return – has seen a spike in inquiries since November last year.

Many South African expats are very homesick and they constantly feed off fear tactics to justify their reasons for remaining away.

Homecoming Revolution's Gia Kalk

“Inquiries about returning home have tripled since November 2017. Our website is receiving over 15,000 hits per month. Traditionally at least 50% of the inquiries we receive translate into an actual return home within one year,” said Gia Kalk of the Homecoming Revolution. “Many South African expats are very homesick and they constantly feed off fear tactics to justify their reasons for remaining away,” added Kalk.

Van den Bergh, who will settle in Johannesburg with her family at the end the year, has found that after a decade of living in the UK, “the grass is not always greener ...” “For every positive in the UK, there is always a negative. “People may feel more secure from random crime but there is the risk of terrorism and gang violence.

“The **National Health Service** may look brilliant from far away but 50% of the time, it is awful.

“I guess we have benefits that as a first-world country a number of our services run well. However, we live with grey skies, rain, mist, fog and a summer that lasts – if we are lucky – about two weeks.

“Most people do not care who you are. There is xenophobia to anyone who is not British in some places ...” Van den Bergh added.

Kalk said that apart from the UK, her office was also receiving inquiries about returning home from the US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Roslynn O’Moore, an administrator for an e-commerce website, returned to Johannesburg eight months ago after living in the UK for two years.

O’Moore left because she has been made redundant by her previous employer and could not find work to support her child.

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Former expat Roslynn O'Moore

But O'Moore also found that the UK is not all that it's cracked up to be.

"It is easier to get work, but more on the low end side, as a carer or cleaner. The stories you hear about how they love South Africans, this is not true. We get treated as foreigners, especially the outskirts of London where they do not like to hire foreigners at all.

"Some of the English are welcoming, but the majority don't like foreigners, even if we have ancestry. I was told a few times to f... off back to where I came from and to stop stealing their jobs."

Economist Dawie Roodt said the repatriation of South Africans "can only mean good things for the country.

"You will be getting people with international experience, coming from a first-world country and to apply those sort of things."