

Why so many of us have felt a pull to return home



When I had a midlife crisis aged 36 I went backpacking around South America for a year. It was an amazing experience, but I did miss home — in particular friends and family. However, I also missed those things that are quintessentially British: a good curry, a cosy pub and Marmite. Plus a whole host of intangible things such as the change of the seasons, the weather (yes, really) and a feeling of belonging.

A friend of mine often asks people how they identify. She identifies as a Yorkshire woman living in London, others too seem to identify just as strongly with where they grew up as with where they live — however long they have lived there. The same is played out in the property market, with people moving across the country — often when they have young families — to bring their children up where they grew up. “I want to give them the childhood I had,” is a common refrain.

This pull towards home has been exacerbated by the pandemic — especially for those who live abroad. Knight Frank says its agents have noticed more expats buying in their home country. The majority want a “50:50” property that would offer them a base back home as well as somewhere that they might consider returning to on a permanent basis one day.

Victoria Garrett, Knight Frank’s head of residential in Asia-Pacific, says: *“For expats with parents back home, or children heading to boarding school abroad — and the prospect of a 12-hour flight to reach them — the pandemic has meant that many are rethinking their long-term plans.”* Some of the expats looking to buy back home in Britain have been living in China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Australia. Plenty of people based in the UK have also been looking homeward, particularly those from Australia and New Zealand.

A survey of 725 expats by expat.com found that 18 per cent flew home at the start of the crisis, with 38 per cent set to follow. The main reasons were to see their families, and trust in their home country’s healthcare system compared with where they were living.

Which brings me to the last group returning: retirees. John Lavin of Cognatum, a retirement home provider, says: *“About 30 per cent of those retiring overseas return within three years, but our expectation is that, as a result of Brexit and coronavirus, this figure will rise considerably over the next year or two.”*

Again, family is a motivator, but so too is healthcare. In typical British fashion, many of us bemoan the state of the NHS — but when we are elsewhere we miss it. A bit like the British weather, no?

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