

Journey to Oz



Nurses **Emma O'Connell** and **Aisling Maher** both travelled to Australia to work. Here, they tell their personal tales of emigration

Emma's story

ON QUALIFYING in 2009, the graduates of my year had some tough decisions to make. Many of my classmates and friends were moving to London, but for me, this was not an option. Travelling with my degree was always something I wanted to do, but for some reason London didn't fall into that category.

In the beginning I looked for jobs without panicking. I was seeking work in theatre – a placement I really enjoyed during my course. After being told by various agencies that there were positions in theatre but no one was willing to take on a new graduate, I began to worry. Then I got the phone call: Guy's and St Thomas' Hospital in London were coming to Dublin to interview new graduates for theatre jobs.

I was thinking 'I don't want to go to London', but I said yes to the interview. Going to London was one of the best decisions I ever made. I gained brilliant experience and met some great people.

I spent two and a half years in Guy's and loved every day of it! I could have happily stayed on working there and saying goodbye was hard, however, I felt that the time was right to start my "real" travelling.

So, my boyfriend and I, are currently eight months into our trip and living in Brisbane. Before this, we spent two months travelling around South East Asia and then flew to Melbourne where we worked for four months.

I joined a nursing agency and was working within weeks of landing in Australia, I couldn't believe how easy it was and how much I enjoy working here. After leaving Melbourne we spent a month travelling the east coast. I even got a visit from my parents which was brilliant!

I am doing agency work here in Brisbane and in the next few weeks we will fly to Perth to work and travel in Western Australia. I am having the time of my life and knowing that I can pick up agency work whenever I need is great.

My plan was to go home after 14 months of travelling but I'm having a great time. I miss home and my family, however, looking at the situation in Ireland, it might be foolish not to consider a second year here.

So, four years after graduating, I haven't worked a day in Ireland as a qualified nurse but I hope this will change in the not too distant future. For any new graduates reading this, I hope you realise the opportunities awaiting you overseas!

Aisling's story

Emigration has become such a common trend for our graduate nurses and midwives. While many of my classmates – graduates of 2012 – enjoy successful careers in London, I was seduced by the lure of the Aussie lifestyle of sun, sea and sand. Last May, I packed my life into a suitcase in the hope of nurturing my sense of adventure and fulfilling my aspiration of a successful career in a sunny land. A hop, skip and two very long plane journeys later, my Australian career began.

I arrived on the ward in a busy Melbourne hospital to bask in the 1:4 nurse-to-patient ratio; a legal mandatory ratio in some Australian states and a breath of fresh air for me, coming from the overcrowded hospital that I trained and worked in. With such a ratio in place, a nurses' workload is more manageable and achievable, allowing for the provision of safe patient care in a less pressured and less stressful environment than I had experienced at home.

Nurses in Australia operate at a calm pace. Burnout and work-related stress are far less prevalent here than in Ireland.

It is difficult for newly-qualified Australian-trained nurses to obtain employment here without doing an elective graduate programme. As Irish-trained nurses com-



Emma O'Connell has worked in the UK and Australia since graduating



Aisling Maher is currently working in Melbourne, Australia

plete their internship pre-registration, we graduate fit-for-purpose and more ward-savvy. I now recognise how valuable and broad my internship experience has been.

The vast knowledge and experience I gained during that time is undeniable and I have matured and developed as a nurse during my first year post-qualification. We are labelled 'the best trained nurses in the world' for a reason!

In Melbourne, I was privileged to attend the International Council of Nurses congress where I met student and graduate nurses and midwives from around the world. It was clear that Irish nursing and midwifery students have gained international admiration for our recent protests to protect our rights and profession.

Our international colleagues applaud and support us, but we are not the only country with financial, resource and staffing difficulties – similar hardships were echoed by nurses from around the globe at the congress.

It was invigorating to learn about various cultures of nursing at the event. I was revitalised by the worldwide respect of the 'art and science' of nursing.

Government policies have resulted in the demoralisation of nurses in recent times, but it is refreshing to be reminded that we have the best nurse's education possible and that we gain a phenomenal amount of exposure and experience in our internship programme.

Nursing is a passport to the world, and I'm delighted to have a few stamps on mine!