

How to survive (and thrive) an Australia summer

Welcome to the New Life in Australia podcast, hosted by me Karen Bleakley, founder of SmartStepsToAustralia.com. Moving to Australia with my family was a life-changing experience. It wasn't without its challenges. That's why I'm passionate about making the relocation and resettlement process easier for you, so you can enjoy this exciting adventure.

Join me and my special guests as we share professional secrets and tips, learn from people who've made the move, and discover businesses that can help you realise your dreams. Now is the best time to create the life you've always wanted. This podcast is here to show you what's possible and to inspire you every step of the way.

Let's go. Let's take a moment to acknowledge the Gubi Gubi people, the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which I live, work and play. I thank them for the privilege of being able to live in such an incredible part of the world, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Hey there. Welcome to this week's episode of the New Life in Australia podcast. I'm your podcast host, Karen Bleakley.

This week I am talking about surviving summer in Australia. Now, when we moved to Australia, I knew that it gets hot and humid here in Queensland, but I wasn't quite prepared for just how hot and humid that it can get. So this episode is all about tips to help you survive the summer and my experience of surviving summer in Australia.

Now, the weather in Australia really is very varied. It does depend on where you live. So do some research about what you can expect from weather in the area where you're moving to.

So here in Queensland, it really is hot for a lot of the year. We have cool winter weather for a few weeks of the year, and the rest of the year is pretty hot, to be honest. We tend to not really get the defined seasons in the same way that you did in the UK, where you kind of had really, really defined kind of autumn and spring seasons here.

Spring can still get insanely hot and so can autumn and summer definitely is very hot and humid. So it seems to just go from winter for a few weeks to just straight onto the switch to summer and stays really hot for weeks and weeks and weeks, which I absolutely love because I really love hot weather. I love sunshine.

So it suits me down to the ground, but not everyone is prepared for it. And as I say, we definitely weren't prepared for it when we made the move here. Hopefully today's episode will help you prepare so that you know what to expect.

And we'll share some tips and some of my quirky hacks to help you stay cool during the summertime. Now, when we first arrived in Australia, we had a rental for four weeks that we stayed in, like a short-term holiday let. It was near the beach and it didn't have air conditioning.

We didn't even think, to be honest, to check whether it had air conditioning. It had ceiling fans. We just booked it.

We arrived. It was September time. So it wasn't really, really hot and humid yet, but the weather was definitely pretty sunny and pretty hot.

So we arrived there. We were really lucky that it was right on the coast. So we did get a coastal breeze, but it was quite hot and it made us realize the importance of having air conditioning in your property.

So when it came to actually choosing a rental to move into, we made that a priority. We made sure that we were looking at houses that had an air conditioning unit in the house because we knew that that was going to be really important to live a comfortable life here in Australia. So the first rental that we took on had one single aircon unit in the living area.

It was kind of an open plan living, dining area. It was really open plan and this living area was really near to the bedroom. So you could turn the aircon unit on and it would actually do quite a good job of cooling the whole house.

It wasn't too bad. It never got too unbearably hot there in this house that we were staying in for the first six months. It was bearable.

It was okay. So when it came to actually choosing a home to buy, we ended up choosing a house to buy that had, again, just one single air conditioning unit in the kind of kitchen living area. And we were hoping that it would do the same sort of job of cooling the whole house.

We were actually quite wrong. It really didn't. We ended up moving to a house that for some reason just seemed to capture the heat, just seemed to be hot for most of the year or in winter, freezing cold for a few weeks as well.

So it just didn't really work for us. It was insanely hot for most of the time. We really did struggle and we were in a position where we couldn't really add any extra aircon units to the house as well because of the way that the house was laid out.

It's like an L-shaped kind of house and we have a lot of windows and there was actually no clear wall space where we were going to be able to add an extra air conditioning unit at a different end of the house. So we ended up living in what was basically a hot box for a really long time while we've been doing different renovations and doing work on the property. So knowing what I know now, I would always be making sure that when I was looking at a property, I was being very cautious to make sure that it had enough air conditioning to cool the home.

Again, I will just add again that this is in Queensland. Different parts of the country are hotter, cooler, more varied in the weather. So whether you find that air conditioning is an absolute non-negotiable will depend on where you're moving and what the weather's like in that area.

But for me now, it's so important to have air conditioning. We ended up installing ducted air conditioning a couple of years ago and oh my goodness, it has made such a difference to our lives. But before we did that, we made sure we did a few other things first.

We insulated the loft, which it hadn't been done before. We live in quite a large low set property. So it's quite a lot of amount of loft floor space to cover.

So that all just took quite a while to do, especially because we started the project during Covid and it was really hard to get products. So we were really struggling to get enough insulation to finish the job. But we insulated the property before we invested in the air conditioning because we knew that when we got air conditioning, having that insulation in place would really help keep the cool into the house.

The other thing that we did was we changed our solar system. Now, we had quite a small solar system that we installed not long after we moved into the property. It was no longer serving our needs.

It wasn't providing enough power for us. So we revamped it and we put in a much bigger solar system and also installed a battery as well. The goal of this really, from my point of view, was that I didn't want to have ducted air conditioning and be worrying about the electricity bill.

Not feeling like I could use it when I wanted to because the electricity bill was going to be too high. So having the big solar system installed and the battery, the goal of that really was to just ease it so that it was an easy decision to just press start on the air conditioning to just cool the whole house. So the big solar system, the battery and the air conditioning, fully ducted air conditioning has really changed our lives.

It has just made the home so much more comfortable and the insulation really does keep the cool air in. So I can't believe we lived for like 10 years in the house without doing those things. It really has made an absolutely massive difference.

So for me now that we've lived with ducted air conditioning, I could not live without it. It really is one of my most favorite things and it's a really expensive addition to our home. It's taken us a long time to kind of save up and pay for it, but it is so worth it.

It really does make a difference to our lives and how comfortable we feel. Even now, when I'm going on holiday, if we're booking like a week's holiday somewhere, we always make sure that the holiday home or the apartment has a couple of air conditioning units. It's like a non-negotiable for us now.

I just don't want to feel uncomfortably hot in my holiday home. It's just not something that I want and I certainly don't want to feel that way in my own home. So air conditioning is amazing, but there are lots of other things that you can do, not just to survive summer.

It's not just about enduring the heat. It's about learning how you can thrive during our summer time as well and actually learn to love it. So here's some tips for you to help you when you move to Australia just to survive through our really intense hot summers.

OK, these are just a random bunch of tips in no particular order, but hopefully some of these will help you and give you some ideas. The first one is carry water everywhere. In the UK, I never had water bottles.

I never thought about making sure that I had water on me all the time. But here in Australia now, we have a cupboard full of insulated water bottles that keep your water nice and cold. We take them everywhere.

Even if we go to the shops, we take water bottles. It is just what we do here. It's just really important to stay hydrated and stay cool.

And I think because the heat is so hot in summer, you really do find that you drink a lot more water. Not to mention, it's really practical because you're not buying plastic bottles that are just chucked into landfill as well. You can actually just refill your bottle with water whenever you need to.

And there are lots of water stations to refill in various places as well while you're out and about. Another tip, which I still do, even though we have air conditioning, we tend to not actually put it on at night times. We tend to have it on during the day times when the solar is actually working and then turn it off to try to carry us through the night with a cooler house.

But it does still get warm on some nights. So a tip that I often use on the really hot summer nights is to get a freezer block, an ice block and wrap it in a tea towel and take it to bed with me. Like you take a hot water bottle to bed, I take an ice block to bed.

My husband thinks I'm totally bonkers, but I really do think it really helps me. And on those nights when it's really sticky and hot and uncomfortable and I get my ice block, I can go straight to sleep because I just feel immediately cooled down. It really does help.

Another thing that can really help cool you down at bedtime is if you've got a pool, get you and your kids to go for an evening swim just before you go to bed and then put on your pyjamas. It brings your body temperature down. And if you don't have a pool, then it's worth having a cool shower just to kind of bring your body temperature down and it just doesn't feel so hot when you do get into bed.

So I've mentioned this already. Keep your aircon units on during the day to cool down the house. Depending on what electricity plan you're on or whether you've got solar, have a think about what the most economical option for you is.

We're on an electricity plan where our electricity usage goes up radically at 4 p.m. in the afternoon. So we tend to use the solar as much as we can while it's sunny. If it's not that sunny at 4 p.m., we'll turn off the aircon and hope that the cool stays for the night.

If it does get really uncomfortable later on, I do keep an eye on the temperatures and we will turn it back on. But if we can, we do our best to try to keep having the aircon on during the day when solar is actually fueling the air conditioning. Another good tip is to keep your curtains closed.

So if it's really, really hot, shutting your curtains really does keep the cool air in and the hot air out. And the funny thing is, when we were in the UK and it was hot, you would open windows. But here when it's really hot, we don't open windows because usually the air outside is much hotter than it is inside.

And you literally, when you open the windows, you can feel the hot air kind of sneaking into your house and it's really not nice. So keep the windows shut, shut the curtains if you need to. And something else you can do, if you've got a side of the house that gets really, really hot and the sun comes around to it, like my office and laundry on the afternoon sun really comes down and really does hit that side of the house.

And you can actually get a film that you can buy from Bunnings that you can coat on the windows, you can just stick it on the windows. So you can choose the transparency and how much you want to restrict coming into the room. You can choose whether you want it to be a dark kind of film or just one that just restricts some of the UV lights and some of the heat that comes through.

So that's definitely something that's on my list to sort out because it really does get hot in a couple of our rooms on one particular side of our house. Most homes here in Australia have ceiling fans and we were really surprised when one broke, we replaced it with a new fan. And that new fan made such a big difference to how cool that room felt.

I was really shocked that literally just changing the fan for a different time, a newer, more modern fan. It made a massive difference. So before we installed up to day conditioning a few years ago, we actually changed all of our fans in our house as well to a new modern fan.

It really has made the house so much cooler. And even if we don't have the air con on, we can have the fans on and it does make a real difference. Now with your fans, they do have a switch on them, which goes from summer mode to winter mode.

So make sure that you've got the switch in the right direction. So they're rotating in the right direction for the summer months so that you maximize the coolness that you can get from the fans. Now, in terms of the intense sun that we have here in Australia, you need to be really cautious when you move to Australia.

It can be really tempting to just get out there really and enjoy this beautiful sunshine. But you do need to be cautious about it. It's about staying covered up in the sun.

It's about wearing hats and sunglasses. It's about wearing rash vests or rash guards when you're out at the beach or you're in the pool. And it's about reapplying sunscreen all the time and making it part of your daily routine, getting your kids used to always applying it before they go to school and making sure that you reapply it on a regular basis.

Where in the summer in the UK, I might wear a sun dress with my shoulders out. Here, it's just not something that I would do. I would try and stay covered up as much as I can.

So especially if I'm going out for a day somewhere like to Australia Zoo or something like that, you want to make sure that you're wearing shirts, that you're covered as much as you can. It just takes off that stress of needing to reapply sunscreen all the time if you can just stay covered up. It goes without saying that when you are planning to go out and about, that you avoid the hottest part of the day.

When we first arrived here, I was really shocked at how playgrounds and parks were just deserted during the middle of the day. But it totally makes sense. It is so hot and quite often

in the playground, slides and things and swings get really overheated and really hot to touch.

So they're not ideal to be going out there and playing at that time of the day. Try and choose places to go that are shaded or go to places that are indoors during the hottest part of the day or schedule your activities for early in the morning or in the late afternoon. In winter, I tend to go for bike rides.

I tend to go for walks more often and things like that. But in summer, we are much more restrictive about what activities we do outside. So I tend to not go for daytime bike rides during the summertime because it's just so hot.

We definitely have to restrict when we do dog walks in summertime because the temperature gets just too hot for the dog's paws. So I tend to have a rule whereby if my feet are too hot on the driveway, then it's too hot for the dog. If I can, I try to walk him in the summer before 8.30. After that, I just find it way too hot to take him out and he doesn't enjoy going out in the heat.

It's really not for him. He much prefers being in the air conditioned house. So if we miss that morning slot, then it's better to just wait and take him when the sun's starting to go down at night.

And it is a really lovely time to go out and take the dog on a walk at nighttime when the sun's coming down. It's still really hot, but the heat of the day has died off and it really is a really nice ending to a nice hot summer's day. Another top tip is to invest in some salt replacement sachets when you get here, like hydrolite or like the icy poles that you can get because they really do help.

They just give you back that energy and they just replace those salts that you've lost through sweating. So especially if you work outside, it can be really valuable, especially when you first arrive here because the heat really does take it out of you. I know that my husband really appreciated them when we first moved here because he was outside a lot in his job and it really did help him recover.

So whether you've just had a big beach day or you've been outside gardening or you've done some DIY, they're really, really good. And we also keep them in for when the kids get sick just to give them some fluid replacements as well. There are lots of places that you can go to cool off.

So whether that is your shopping mall, your libraries, your community centers, or you might find that there are outdoor swimming pools that you can go to if you don't have your own pool. So I think make the most of the opportunities to cool off wherever you can. So summer in Australia is intense.

It is just so different to anything that we'd ever experienced in the UK. But the amazing thing is it's hot every day. It's not like the UK where you might have three or four days of really intense heat and then it dies off and it's freezing cold and rainy again for a while.

Through Australia's summer, really for us in Queensland anyway, from September right the way through till May, it's really hot weather. We have loads of sunshine. Yes, we do also get lots of storms and things too and a bit of unsettled weather here and there.

But the weather is just something that you can mostly rely on here in Queensland and I absolutely love it. So I hope this episode all about surviving summer in Australia has been helpful for you. It really is an incredible time of year and I do really love it.

I just think there's just some things that you just need to be aware of and help you plan to stay safe and cool. It's all about making sure that you've got access to air conditioning, stay hydrated, avoiding the peak summer heat and being prepared. So summer in Australia is not just about surviving it, it really is about learning how to adapt to it and how to thrive one cool hack at a time.

Now I'd love to hear it. Do you have your own quirky summer survival tips that you can share with me on social media? I would love to hear it. So that's it from this week's episode.

I hope you enjoyed it and I'll catch you next week. In the meantime, let's start building your new life in Australia one episode at a time.

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