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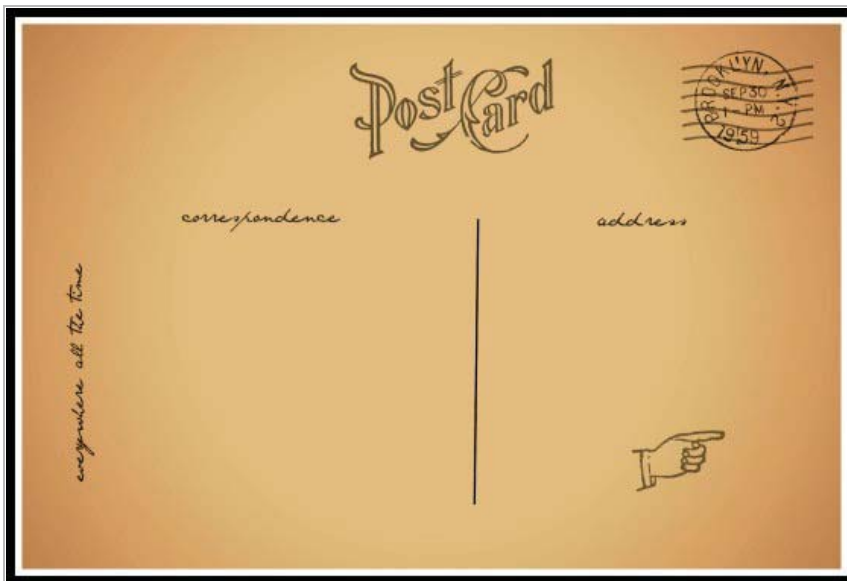
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Postcard: Leaving Sydney

POSTED ON FEBRUARY 4, 2014 BY BANI AMOR

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Leaving Sydney

by [Roz Bellamy](#)

I've been living in Melbourne for seven years. My reasons for moving here strike me as vague, ill-considered. My partner's family lived in Melbourne and we were sick of Sydney – or at least the cost of living there. We had a craving for change and new places. As a tourist, I fall in love with cities so easily. I walk for hours, gaining a sense of the layout and finding places tucked away down side streets that I wouldn't have found in a guidebook.

I become proficient in the public transport system, confidently instructing other tourists on which buses to take. In New York, I found the Subway exciting. I enjoyed the mix of suits, designer dresses, dreadlocks and tattoos, and the unique characters hassling passengers on the train. Even as I gripped onto my bag and felt around for my wallet, I loved the new faces, voices and drama. I spot cafés and bookshops that I know would be my 'regular' if I were a local. I look wistfully at real estate in an appealing suburb and take long walks around it to imagine living there. I stare at the locals as though they are future friends.



Bani Amor is a queer travel writer from Brooklyn by way of Ecuador. She is a travel columnist for YouQueen.com, a contributing writer for Nowhere Magazine's blog, and editor of Everywhere All The Time's Postcards series. Her work has been published in Word Riot, Bluestockings Magazine and Matador Network, among others.



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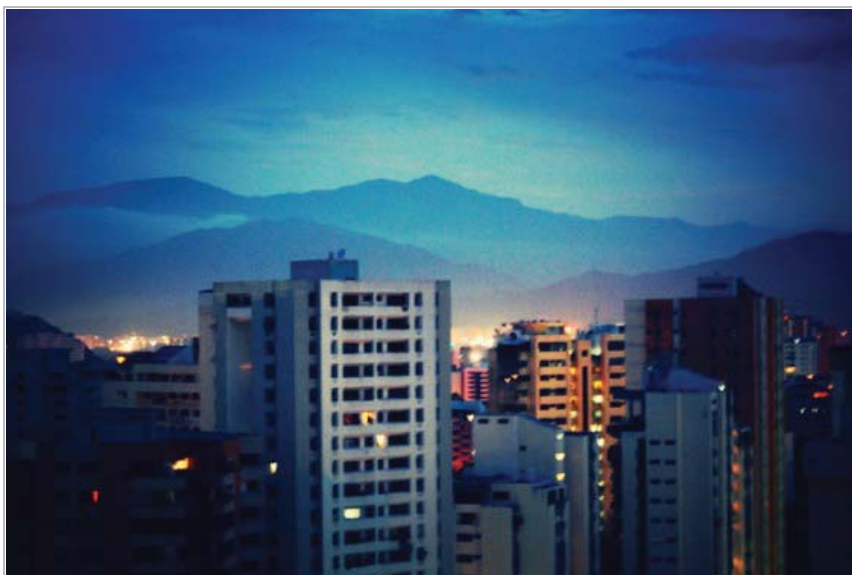
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It is so easy to romanticize a city when it isn't where you leave work in the dark; the place where you pay your bills and worry about real life.



After an unseasonably warm weekend spent alternating between restaurants and shops with my partner, jittery from good food and coffee, I had that feeling about Melbourne.

In all my tourist reveries, I never thought about the realities of picking up and moving to a new place. In my mind, you reinvented yourself in the new city: you had a new job and friends instantly. You somehow had the expendable income for both dining out and socializing all the time, for flying to see your family as often as you liked.

On the day we left Sydney, my 89-year-old grandfather insisted on taking us to the airport. He'd lost his license almost immediately after the over-85s driving test was enforced in New South Wales, and his concept of transporting now meant escorting. He received discounted taxi journeys as a senior and insisted on getting up early that day and accompanying me and my girlfriend in the taxi and then paying for the remainder of the fare after he got home again. He donned his blue blazer and looked very dignified.

Soon after settling into an apartment in Melbourne, my grandmother sent me a gift – a soap dispenser in the shape of a cow, covered in hideous pink glitter that read, “I miss you.” It would be an eyesore to anyone else, but I couldn't bear to look at it for other reasons and put it away in a cupboard.

Every time I flew back to Sydney, I felt anxiety from using up my few days of leave and paying for the chaotic after-work Friday to late Sunday return flights. I would come home depleted physically and emotionally. It turns out that the new place quickly takes on the shape of the old. Your items come with you. Your bills and stress levels follow. Your bubble of excitement bursts. I lost a lot of weight and kept getting one sickness after another.

It turned out I had an autoimmune disease thought to be brought on by stress.

Home meant flying to Sydney and spending every possible second with family. It also meant returning to Melbourne after midnight, unpacking my bag, trying to shake off the pang of missing people and getting ready for work the next day. As hard as it was to say goodbye, the hardest bit was when the plane lifted off the tarmac and I looked down at the lights of Sydney Harbor from that strange angle of a plane window. When we landed, the flight attendants would welcome us home, but it never felt like I'd landed in my home city. The taxi driver at Tullamarine would greet me cheerfully and tell me how the weather had been, or ask where I had gone. I would then sink back into the chair and stare out the window on the long drive home.



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Eventually, it became impossible to fly back frequently. My colleagues and friends would complain about their families while I longed for mine.



I now know that the old city eventually loses some of its grip on you. I replaced Sydney beaches with Melbourne parks, and got used to having to supplement vitamin D. Several of my favorite places in Sydney closed down. Many friends moved away. The landmarks were beautiful but almost foreign to me, like I was a tourist observing them with detached delight. Landing at Sydney airport felt as strange as landing in Melbourne used to.

My grandfather and grandmother passed away since I left. Sydney became the city of loss, grief and nostalgia, a place to dream of the past. I find it very painful to spend time in the suburb my grandparents lived in and areas where I grew up. These places are imbued with feelings, and unfortunately it is the darkest emotions that linger and will endure. Now, when I land in Melbourne a weight is lifted off my shoulders.

Sometimes the past is intangible, beyond our reach, but it can be brought back. All the feelings and memories of leaving Sydney return when I remember my grandfather waving from a taxi, looking small and proud in his blazer, and when I see my grandmother's 'I miss you' cow, tucked away in the closet. It is human nature to compartmentalize, and there is nothing more potent than grief and nostalgia to make me lock up the past. It is safest to avoid looking at a photograph of my grandfather holding me as an infant so proudly, and I purposely walk past a restaurant my grandmother loved without looking in at our usual table.

To be able to cope with loss, we find distractions, pursue changes in our lives and learn to walk away when we need to. Leaving Sydney was the best thing I could have done.

Roz Bellamy is a writer and editor based in Melbourne, Australia. She has studied creative writing at the University of Technology, Sydney and at writing workshops in Australia and internationally. Travel is her life force; she loves its potential to develop empathy, perspective and a deeper cultural understanding in such a wide range of people.

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