

The longer I live away from home, the harder it gets. It's an interesting paradox – the wrestling of two homes, my identity is continually divided. I have a lingering sensation of, 'not quite here, but not quite *there*'.

With the passing years I'm clasp onto my roots whilst simultaneously surrendering, attempting to fit within my adopted home – yet I still have it easier than others.

My two homes are Adelaide (Australia) and New York City (USA). There's no language barrier, and although the two cities are worlds apart, life feels surprisingly the same. I work, see friends, enjoy the city, go on road trips, and chase my big goals.



Adelaide is a small and easy city. Image: Sonia Tyndale

I've pondered this interesting notion on many a sleepless night. If life follows the same trajectory, why do I choose to live abroad? What happens when we disrupt the pattern? Many people live abroad but most return home armed with their accumulated knowledge and experiences.

But what about the few who stay? Those who live hyphenated lives, with heart at home, yet their body and mind are elsewhere. It's the expats, those who are citizens of the world, who have, and are, suffering the greatest emotional toll.

My remedy to this ongoing straddle between two homes has always been to return to Australia each year. Devoting two months to reconnecting in person with my family and friends. To walk down the same streets that shaped me, and anchor myself back into those memories. The past two years, however, have seen me grounded in New York and with firm border closures, exorbitant flight prices, and uncertainty about entry rules, my yearly 'grounding' ritual hasn't been possible. By the time I make it home again, it'll most likely be three years since my previous visit, and consequently, my feelings of dislocation are exacerbated.



Returning to Adelaide for two months every year has been a 'grounding' ritual. Image: Xan Holyoak

Home soil

Being able to visit home every year kept me energised. There's something to be said about returning to New York after touching base with family and close friends. A safe, familiar place and faces, a foundation on which to regroup, and to re-establish my focus.

That feeling I get when I see New York all over again with fresh eyes is a reminder of why I fell for this city. It helps me push forward in pursuit of my dreams.

There's a lot of birth and death in this lifestyle. But this contrast is the reason why it's so powerful. When every 'hello' inevitably leads to a 'goodbye' and time has an expiration date, true relationships grow.

There's a silent agreement that 'we only have so much time together, so let's make the most of it.' Those moments are authentic and honest. They often cultivate something more nourishing and supportive which tends to get otherwise get neglected when loved ones are just a short drive away.

In contrast, some relationships need physical presence to survive and often these connections will naturally fall away. But with a special few, the bond isn't severed by borders, babies, and time zones.



The cityscape of New York has become my second home.

Loving from afar

We know that human connection is crucial to wellbeing, and surrounding ourselves with those we love or the inability to do so, has a profound impact.

While living bi-culturally has gifted me more than I could have ever imagined, not being able to return home is particularly challenging on mental and emotional health. I often occupy feelings of guilt for missing out on the big moments – the engagements, weddings, housewarmings, baby showers, and first birthdays.

But what's come as more of a surprise is just how important the small moments are – the weekly coffee catchups, the house visits, the regular walks, and spontaneous phone calls (without worrying about the other person being asleep).

The wrestling of two worlds is hard at the best of times. But since the pandemic, it's been impossible to process all the feelings, fears, missed moments, and grief.

There's this short-sighted perception that if I'm not in Australia, it's because I've *chosen* to be in the U.S. That my life here is by default 'better'.

It's not.

It's different yet at the same time, similar. I live in a state of push-pull. I go from craving Australia to knowing I'm exactly where I want to be, at this chapter in my life.

It's never black and white.



I've always been a citizen of the world and I'm lucky enough to hold two places in my heart.

Beyond the hyphen

My Grandparents immigrated to Australia from the United Kingdom, so it seems that a life filled with *departures* is in my blood. Maybe my quest is an extension of my lineage, rather than a whole new thread? Maybe the Australian-American equation is nothing more than fiction? That in truth, I've always been a citizen of the world and I'm lucky enough to hold two places in my heart.

Maybe the yearning for belonging in both homes is only solved by surrendering the hyphen and celebrating the borderless? One isn't better than the other, and one doesn't cancel the other out.

While the pandemic hasn't been kind to the travel journalist, it's fertile ground for the culture writer. As a cultural commentator covering travel, society, immigrant life, politics, and collective psychology, being an Australian grounded in the U.S. has enriched my work.

I'm able to observe what's occurring in both places from an outsider's perspective. From complacency to overtly political, it's been fascinating to witness and wrestle with the state of society, through the lens of the culture writer.

This interrogation is a key component imprinted into my future travel writing work. It'll undoubtedly continue to shape not only the way I write but how I process 'home.'



The concept of 'Home' and how I process its meaning will continue to change.



'Home' invites lessons with each visit

With a three-year stretch between visits, I'm expecting this expedition home to be the most transformative. Every time I return home to a city that's changed, people who've grown in their own journeys, and my perception shaped through unique experiences.

The challenge is accepting everything as it is, without judgement or attachment. If anyone can do this with graceful fluidity, it's the traveller with many homes.

You might discover this, too. A road trip might turn into a three, four, five-year round-the-country odyssey. You'll always have a 'home', family, and friends to come back to... but find an amazing, enriching new 'life' on the road.

Or maybe, the notion of 'home' evolves altogether.