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Australians abroad not as welcome

By Samela HARRIS

SO busy are Australians frothing with hatred towards people who want to come to our country that they have not noticed that others are not so keen to have us any more.

Britain is looking for ways to deter young Aussie adventurers from using it as the traditional overseas home base and it is tipped that by the month's end, the Old Dart may have implemented visa reforms cutting the working holiday time of under-28-year-old Aussies from two years to one.

For the past 40 years or so, young Aussies have flooded to London to work and play. There are parts of London that are more Australian than Australia.

Kangaroo Valley, otherwise known as Earls Court, has been a hideous parody of the worst of the great Australian cliché. Away from Australia, young Australians seem to need to demonstrate the great Australian crassness, the beer-swilling party-time excesses of an extended Bachelors and Spinsters Ball.

The few forays I ever made into Kangaroo Valley reduced me to a state of cringe. It also explained to some extent the varying degrees of anti-Australianism I encountered among the English.

Young Aussies troop to England at the rate of 17,000 a year. Lots stay; some never come back. Right now, there are almost 250,000 Australians living in London.

I have to admit that I was once one. For 11 years. But apart from working with Australians at AAP Reuters, I found myself steering clear of fellow countrymen and trying desperately to redeem the national reputation. However, my years in Edinburgh, London and Surrey were largely happy ones and friendships were enduring. I took the Aussie-baiting in good humour. While the English are considering making long stays harder for the brash young working-holiday Australians, they are anything but hostile towards professional Aussies. The same reforms that intend to curtail the working options of the young hope to open the doors for professionals with no age limitations.

The British Government, dealing with its own immigration issues, feels the casual, unskilled jobs which young traveller Aussies take so willingly should be

available to the country's needy. On the other hand, the country has a dire need for teachers, nurses and other professionals.

They are not averse to high-quality Aussie experts. They invite our brains to drain in their direction. And, since we don't seem to use them, it makes sense. Just watch the new wave of scientists leave following the latest federal re-prioritising of the country's scientific research funding which asserts profit over knowledge.

However, we remain a tiny country in the population scheme of things. Our infrastructure is in tatters thanks to years of merger/sell-off/rationalisation/budget-cutting in business, health, science and academia. At the same time as we complain about people wanting to come here, we are losing people in all directions. They're not looking for freedom. They're looking for appreciation. Ain't it all ironic?

harriss@adv.newsltd.com.au