

KERRY IS... OUTSPOKEN

“When do we stop being ‘new’ to Dubai?”

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Would it be a huge cliché to start a column by quoting Carrie Bradshaw? Apologies in

advance if so, because here it comes: The expensively shod one once said you have to have lived in Manhattan for at least 10 years before it's acceptable to call yourself a New Yorker. This made me wonder (as Bradshaw herself was wont to do while smoking at her laptop) what sort of stint you have to put in here in Dubai – another transient, multi-cultural, expat-filled city – before it officially becomes “home”. It was then I was struck by a crucial difference. Were we to suddenly up sticks and move to New York City, most of us would be living for the day we could legitimately call ourselves a local without being dismissed as a desperate try-hard. Whereas Dubai seems to have the opposite effect on its expats. We still refer to ourselves as ‘new’ even after we’ve sweated our way through a third summer, or continue to insist “just one more year and that’s it” as we accept a new job or renew the lease on an apartment – as though living in Dubai were some sort of bad habit we can’t quite quit. For some reason, this city makes commitment-phobes of us all.

I’m the first to admit guilt on this front. “Oh, but I am quite new,” I explain, when people wonder why I still don’t drive here, or why I’m still using a rubbish pay-as-you-go phone that someone once mistook for a keyring, or why I still pay monthly to keep my old UK number (which nobody ever calls, because everybody except

me understands that I don’t live there anymore).

I blame my attitude when I first got here. I accepted a job (not this one, I hasten to add) and boarded a plane on a whim, ready and willing to embrace all the excitement of life in a new and unfamiliar country, but never truly believing I’d be here much longer than a year at most. I realise now that that outlook informed every decision I went on to make. It’s why I’ve lived in five different apartments in less than three years but still don’t own any furniture, and have only just bid a cheerful farewell to the paper-thin IKEA pillows I bought for my first place. Interior decorating was something I’d do later on, I thought, in my ‘real’ home, somewhere else. It’s only recently dawned on me that this weird reluctance to accept that Dubai is where my life is now has been preventing me from actually living it. More than two years on, I’m still here, still furniture-free, and I’ve got a bit of a sore neck.

I might be an extreme case, but even friends of mine who’ve started to put down proper roots here, by starting families or setting up their own businesses, still talk as though ending up here was a complete accident. They widen their eyes in disbelief as they ponder the speed with which one year in the sunshine turned into five, or ten – as if settling in the city is something that happened while they weren’t paying attention. Speaking purely from an expat’s perspective, what is it that makes us all so eager to explain away our reasons for being in Dubai, when to anybody looking

in from the outside, it must be perfectly obvious? Let’s be honest, the daily grind (if we can call it that) is a different beast when you can start it with an alfresco jog or breakfast on the balcony, and end it with a dip in the pool, or by meeting friends to eat burgers on Kite Beach as the sun goes down.

If we so choose, we can spend our weekends lazing on sun loungers, eating Michelin-starred food, cycling at Al Qudra, wake surfing or sailing around the Palm, exploring art galleries, or – a personal favourite – watching a movie while fully reclined in a leather armchair, complete with pillows, blankets and waiter service. It’s time to give the denial a rest and just admit it: life here is pretty fun.

For me, as I hurtle rapidly towards my third Dubai anniversary, reflecting on my time here thus far is a lesson in the advantages of committing wholeheartedly to a decision, of jumping into something feet first, instead of dragging them. Because, by and large, it’s been brilliant. And had I stopped fighting it, it might have been even better. I could have avoided one or more of several incredibly stressful house moves. I certainly could have had better back support.

The new pillows confirm it: right now, Dubai is home. Thinking about it, life here does have one thing in common with a bad habit – it’s addictive.



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