



## Australian lawyers living and practising law in different parts of the world

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*Are you an Australian lawyer overseas? If you'd like to share your story, email [explainers@afrc.com](mailto:explainers@afrc.com)*

**Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Nov, 2023**



## Why Australian lawyers want to live and work overseas

Ciara Seccombe

Welcome to our new weekly blog that features Australian lawyers who are living and practising law in different parts of the world.

We've decided to showcase legal professionals at all levels of their careers – with different areas of expertise – as well as share the practical details, such as what you can expect to earn, the cost of living, cultural differences, and just how hard (or easy) it is to get a legal job in a particular city, or country.

That's because practising overseas is basically a rite of passage for Australian lawyers: it can be lucrative; it enhances the CV; and, in some countries, it's not that hard to get into practice.

"Experience in markets other than Australia is valuable for many reasons, including developing your legal expertise, the different kinds of clients and working cultures you're exposed to," says Renae Lattey, chief executive partner of global law firm King & Wood Mallesons.

She says lawyers with overseas experience are considered more valuable upon return.

"We want people to go overseas and master their legal craft," Lattey says, adding: "Of course, we want them to come back to work for us."

Recruiter Rachael Duggan, of Duggan+Della, says the international community also views Australians as a valuable investment. Australian law schools are highly regarded, as is the early career experience lawyers receive at firms here, she says.

But, of course, what demand looks like for Australian lawyers depends on the country and the area of practice.

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## Working abroad helped Helen Tung turn 'legal futurism' into a career

Ciara Seccombe

Helen Tung was in her mid-twenties and working as a litigator in London when she had a "quarter-life crisis".

The Melbourne native, who studied at the University of Sheffield in England, moved back home to work as a foreign-qualified lawyer advising clients on international law. It was then she decided the traditional route wasn't working for her.



Helen Tung now lives in the United Arab Emirates.

"I thought to myself, I could do this for the rest of my life – I could see myself, 80 years old, taking my suitcase into court – or I could be doing something different," Tung tells *The Australian Financial Review*.



She decided to merge her passion for law and technology, and attended a months-long course at the Singularity University, a highly networked institution that focuses on advancing technologies, at NASA Silicon Valley campus.

She then co-founded a satellite propulsion start-up, which “failed miserably”.

“At the bar, the way we’re trained is not [to chase] perfection, but you want to win every case. You can’t always win in the start-up world, it’s actually the polar opposite. And you really have to get out of your comfort zone, where there’s so much uncertainty,” she says.

Nevertheless, she found the experience invigorating, and it led her to an engineering course at the International Space University in Delft, in the Netherlands.

Space law is a tricky field to work in from a pure law background, and many practitioners have some form of science education.

“I remember attending a conference called The Water on the Moon, where I walked in, sat down for five minutes, and I understood nothing.”

Other parts of the program included lectures on nanotech and immortality, which Tung described as “a deep dive into the matrix”.

## UAE career opportunities

After several years, including a stint in Japan, Tung moved to the United Arab Emirates to work for the UAE Space Agency, drafting new space-oriented reinsurance laws. She now has her own consultancy where she advises entrepreneurs in the space industry.

Tung says that along with a thriving expat community, the career opportunities in the UAE were the main drawcard for moving to the Middle East country.

She is also a teaching fellow at the Australian College of Law, where she teaches International Arbitration, Space Law, and ESG.



The city offers an engaging music scene and many high-quality restaurants. When she wants to escape the city, she's only 30 minutes away from the desert, allowing her to easily enjoy the UAE's natural landscape. The country has a hot, arid climate and in the summer temperatures range between 35 and 45. It's much milder in winter, when temperatures are between 15 and 25.

The UAE is a good country for her practice because the culture is entrepreneurial and embraces new technologies firmly. "They are constantly reinventing themselves," Tung says.

### Booming space sector

"Space law is still very theoretical. The beauty right now is it's a booming sector, with entrepreneurs who are trying to create technologies where there are no laws," Tung says.

"You can try and adapt [existing laws]. You can say, 'that looks like consumer law', 'that looks like it could be medical device law', etc. But the beautiful thing is, we can also create new law, which is the most exciting thing for me."

Tung sees new legal issues arising from mass adoption of space travel. In particular, she hopes to develop laws around space resources before they become something we fight over.

A recent law passed in Luxembourg allows private companies to retain ownership of resources mined in space. It has attracted a lot of attention and talent to the small European nation. Tung says this could become ugly if more countries attempt to pass similar laws.

**10.14AM** – Aug 8, 2023



## \$17,000 a month for a beginner lawyer in Switzerland. There's just one catch

Ciara Seccombe

Courtney Furner did not move to Switzerland on a whim.

After taking her oath in Perth in 2012, Furner began working as a lawyer at Norton Rose Fulbright in arbitration and litigation, before taking a job at the Supreme Court of Western Australia.



Courtney Furner has moved from Western Australia to work in Switzerland.

But during the Australian winter, she would fly across the world to attend higher education courses in international law.

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



“Almost every winter in Perth, I went to Europe and attended a summer school, or an academy to try and figure out if this was something that I would want to do,” Furner tells *The Australian Financial Review*.

She has had a longstanding interest in international law and dispute settlement.

During her university studies, she spent a year abroad in Vienna, and completed a short stint as an intern at the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, a court of law that dealt with war crimes during the 1990s.

After graduating, and with a few years’ work experience under her belt, Furner moved to Europe to undertake a specialised master’s program in international dispute settlement in Geneva, Switzerland. The program is highly selective, and only accepts 30 students a year.

“From the minute you arrive in this program, they basically gear you up for your professional life after the master’s,” Furner says. “It’s fun to go study abroad for a year, but if you’re not going to get a job out of it, then it’s a bit in vain, at least financially.”

After completing the one-year program, Furner began work at LALIVE, a boutique international law firm in Zurich which specialises in international dispute resolution (and has an association with the master’s program, so students may be able to intern there).



Furner has spent several years working as a lawyer overseas.

Furner says European firms are often impressed by Australians' practical skills. This is compared to many European lawyers who have to take multiple bar exams and, in some cases, complete a PhD before entering the workforce.

"By the time [they] get into the workforce, many can be academic and can lose the forest for the trees," she says. "Aussie lawyers are highly regarded for their native English language and drafting skills. We're also pretty pragmatic."

### Salary and career growth

Working in Switzerland gave Furner more opportunities to work on challenging and exciting cases as counsel, arbitrator and tribunal secretary than she would have in Australia.

"[The arbitration scene] is quite developed. But Geneva, Zurich, London, Paris, Singapore, Hong Kong, these are the key [global] arbitration hubs, at least for now."



An arbitration lawyer in Australia with two full years of experience would be looking at salaries of about \$110,000 to 125,000 per year, which includes super. A lawyer with the same level of experience would be making easily double that in Switzerland.

Newly qualified lawyers in Switzerland are often paid about 10,000 Swiss francs a month (\$17,000) before tax. And they typically get paid an extra month's salary each year.

But there's a catch.

"You think like, 'Whoa, I'm gonna invite my whole family to a villa in Tuscany next year!' And then you see the rents," she laughs. Zurich's residents pay between 2000 and 5000 Swiss francs a month (about \$3500 to \$8500) in rent.

The upside is that income tax is low (though it varies across the country due to the canton system), and many small luxuries are also cheap in Switzerland.

"Cheese and wine are pretty cheap in the supermarkets, and hiking doesn't cost anything. Going down to the farmers market is very cheap. Many Swiss mountain resorts also allow children to ski or snowboard for free on Saturdays."

The language barrier

Despite having well-regarded credentials, it can be difficult for Australians to find work in non-English-speaking countries. Australia has a pretty poor rate of bilingualism compared to European nations. In 2016, the census showed only 10 per cent of year 12 students were studying a language.

"There is a trade-off [for employers]; between hiring a native English speaker who is a strong drafter but who may only be able to work in English, versus someone who can draft and review documents and converse with a more diverse range of clients, witnesses and experts and even teams in different languages."

This isn't an issue for Furner, who works in both English and German. At her firm, the team collectively speaks 24 languages, hails from 30 different countries and are qualified in 18

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jurisdictions. She was also able to get a European passport through her mother and grandparents, who immigrated to Australia from Poland in the 1950s.

Without a Swiss or EU passport, it can be very difficult to land a job there, so carving out a niche, or applying for a role within an international organisation or in diplomatic circles could help.

### Work-life balance

Moving to Switzerland also changed her approach to work. The country also places value on work-life balance, meaning not all Swiss lawyers feel the need to work themselves to the bone and sacrifice their leisure time for career advancement.

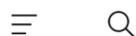
Outside of work, Furner's colleagues can often be found swimming in the lakes or skiing or hiking in the alps. Her pastime of choice is hiking, which surprised her after growing up in Perth.

"I own the whole kit and caboodle," she enthused. "I have the zip-off hiking pants, the skis, the poles."

"When you go to a conference, there's a little bit of shop talk, but not so much. The conversation quickly changes to, 'Which mountain did you climb on the weekend? Where are you going this weekend? Did you catch the good snow?'"

That said, the nature of international work often requires Furner to work collaboratively with clients, experts and witnesses in different time zones, and keep more flexible hours. But, staff at her firm are discouraged from working late nights and weekends unless there is an imminent deadline.

**10.21AM** – Aug 1, 2023



## Salary trade-off came as a surprise: life as a lawyer in Jakarta

Ciara Seccombe

Dan Trevanion, 29, was accustomed to working in a more formal office setting at Ashurst in Sydney, so when he was transferred to the firm's Jakarta office and his social life was supercharged overnight, it came as a surprise.

"[Colleagues] go out for after-work drinks, socialise, the kind of things which I think some people don't expect from a Muslim-majority country," Trevanion says.

"But like anywhere, people have different levels of faith, and they have different practices associated with that."



Dan Trevanion in Ashurst's Indonesia office.

Picking Jakarta over Sydney

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



Trevanion always knew he wanted a career in Indonesia. After graduating from ANU, he moved from his hometown of Canberra to work for Ashurst in Sydney, but kept an eye out for other opportunities. His mother, an Indonesian national, inspired him to explore his roots, which led to his unconventional choice to practise law in her home country.

“I was looking ahead in Sydney and I could clearly see what my next five years were going to be like, what the promotion track would be, what the salaries and work would be as well,” Trevanion says.

“But I wanted a lot more unpredictability, to have a really steep learning curve and the opportunity to step up and stand out as an individual.”

### Indonesia's foreign lawyer rules

He found Indonesia, however, to be a hard market to crack. The government has a strong focus on growing its domestic legal industry and places hard limits on the number of foreign lawyers allowed to work in the country.

For every foreign lawyer employed at an Indonesian office, the firm must employ four Indonesians. Trevanion's office is capped at five foreign lawyers. In fact, he says, there are fewer than 50 foreign lawyers in the country. They are also required to provide 100 hours of volunteer legal work.

“Really, the idea is that if you're going to have foreign lawyers here taking jobs from local lawyers, they should be contributing to the development of the legal scene here.”

### Forget the 'expat bubble' in Jakarta

The low number of foreign lawyers means it's hard to get stuck in an “expat bubble”, which can easily happen in other countries.

Spending downtime in the office is common because of the relaxed, friendly atmosphere, and as a result Trevanion's colleagues have become his friends – more so than in Australia. He says his colleagues will often stay late if the weather or the traffic is bad.

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"In Australia if we've got after-work plans, some people might pop home and come back later. Grab a change of clothes, come back out, meet you at seven or something a bit later," Trevanion says.

"Here, if we've got eight o'clock plans, like badminton with the firm, we're just in the office until eight o'clock, waiting until everyone's ready. In Indonesia, your work colleagues are very much your friends."

Even outside his firm, he plays basketball with other legal professionals every Sunday morning.

Less lucrative but intellectually stimulating

Trevanion says Indonesia is probably a less lucrative place to work than locations such as London, Dubai or New York, but the extra intellectual stimulation and social life in Jakarta are a worthwhile trade-off.

Trevanion works in Ashurst's projects and energy transition team. While the renewable energy transition is slower in Indonesia than in Australia, he can see a lot of structural changes on the horizon.

"There's obviously a lot of coal-fired power here, which is different to Australia which is shutting down coal-fired power stations. Here, they're looking to do a bit of a slower transition. But that means there are a lot of investment opportunities for solar, wind and others here."

For example, Indonesia wants to set up a Tesla manufacturing hub, aided by its large supply of nickel, and plans to work with Australia, which has a large supply of lithium.

"So there are plans, I think, in the policy settings to try and combine [the two countries' resources] to aid the energy transition."

**10.03AM** – Jul 25, 2023

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## 'You're expected to work harder': Life as an Aussie lawyer in Hong Kong

Ciara Seccombe

Andrew Fei, a banking and finance partner at King & Wood Mallesons, has been working in Hong Kong for a year, and he thinks about the weather more than he used to in Australia, which says a lot since he used to live in Melbourne.

Every morning during Hong Kong's typhoon season, he looks at the forecast, before working out whether he can leave for the office – or stay at home in his low-rise apartment near the beach where he can see the storms coming in from the ocean.



High-calibre work: Andrew Fei, a partner with KWM in Hong Kong.



“Most offices require staff to work from home if a typhoon signal number 8 or above or a rainstorm black signal is hoisted by the Hong Kong Observatory,” Fei tells *The Australian Financial Review*.

“When that occurs, the wind is extremely strong, the rain is very heavy and public transport becomes very crowded, inconvenient and potentially dangerous.”

A good balance between working from home and office

He occasionally also works from home for convenience, but otherwise commutes to the office most days, which is in a 48-storey office tower above a high-end shopping centre and metro station, in Hong Kong's Central business district.

Fei says the office is still an important place for the exchange of ideas, but the integration of work-from-home in the office culture is a benefit.

“The office is still a pretty special place for brainstorming and exchanging ideas, and informal chats around the water cooler are not only fun but also important for team bonding.”

Why Fei wanted to work in Hong Kong

Fei is among the many Australians who choose Hong Kong as a place to practise law.

He says Hong Kong offers young lawyers the opportunity to work on high-profile, large-scale projects that they may not have access to in Australia.

Over the past year, he has worked on his most meaningful project yet: landmark netting and collateral legal opinions for the International Swaps and Derivatives Association regarding derivatives transactions with Chinese counterparties.

Basically, the team issues very detailed legal opinions and legal analysis on the laws of their jurisdiction, and whether those laws support netting of derivative transactions. If



their opinions are accepted by the industry, the firm's banking clients can start doing more deals in China, including Hong Kong.

"It allows the banks to basically enter into the market in a very cost-effective way," Fei says. "I think it was over 350 pages of legal analysis. Over 1000 footnotes. But it was also a very great learning process. Almost every aspect of law that I've learned, all the principles I've come across were applied and analysed in these legal opinions."

High expectations but vibrant life

As a result, he says he was able to quickly gain recognition from the global financial services sector and build a profile in the market.

The career acceleration he has experienced does come with high expectations. The local industry has a strong culture of hard work with an emphasis on top-quality legal advice.

"There is a general expectation, I think, that things move a little bit faster in Hong Kong. I think lawyers would genuinely be expected to work harder in Hong Kong, [but] I don't think it's a major transition."

Other than being exposed to high-calibre legal work, another benefit to living in Hong Kong is the vibrant life outside the office.

"[Hong Kong] has lots of iconic man-made and natural landscapes to explore, and it's the perfect location for those who like to travel on weekends. Most travel destinations in Asia are just a short flight away."

Fei has also developed a new routine. "My day begins with exercise. During the (extremely) hot and humid summer months, I go swimming in the morning and during the cooler seasons, I go for a run." He is training for the Hong Kong Marathon, which will be held in January.

How to work in Hong Kong as an Australian lawyer

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As a common law jurisdiction, Hong Kong does recognise Australian legal education and qualification, but prospective practitioners will need to make extra effort to practise Hong Kong law.

Foreigners must complete the [Overseas Lawyers Qualification Examination](#), which tests professionals on the unique aspects of the city's law. In particular, one must demonstrate proficiency in property and constitutional law to be admitted as a solicitor, regardless of the area they intend to practice.

The exams are held annually in October and November, and costs HK\$3300 (\$627.29) to sit. Fei spent several months preparing before sitting the test. King & Wood Mallesons supported his preparation to transfer to their Hong Kong office and paid his examination fees.

As a major trade and financial hub, the presence of competing firms from the US, UK, and other high-paying nations push up salaries in the city. Much like Singapore, lower income tax further sweetens the deal, as salaries of over HK\$200,000, the maximum income bracket, are only taxed at 17 per cent.

**11.21AM** – Jul 18, 2023

## From mid-tier Brisbane lawyer to Linklaters partner at 36

In 2016, Andrew Poulton, then 29, was working for mid-tier firm McCullough Robertson in Brisbane as a senior associate in its litigation team. But he and his wife were ready to broaden their horizons, so he started looking for jobs in London.

Poulton applied, from Brisbane, for a managing associate role at Linklaters, a top-tier firm and member of the “Magic Circle” of elite, London-headquartered firms.



Brisbane-born Andrew Poulton with his wife and two kids in London.



The process was intense. First, there was an online assessment, then a Watson Glaser test to assess his critical thinking. After scoring highly on those, Poulton went through three rounds of interviews. The first two were with Linklaters partners, and the third involved a practical assessment where he had to advise on a fictional legal dilemma.

He scored the job, and he began a rapid ascent at the firm. Within six years, he had made partner.

Why London? Poulton, whose parents were both teachers, grew up in Pittsworth, a small town in Queensland, about as far away from the London business district as one could be. But he wanted to chase the complex, international disputes he just didn't have access to in Brisbane. And the much larger London salaries added to the appeal.

His specialty is crisis litigation, often around financing disputes, representing clients who face significant reputational or commercial risk. The cases he takes on these days span jurisdictions and sectors, and draw attention from the British press.

"It's quite a special experience when you're reading the *Financial Times*, and they're covering cases that you're working on," he told *The Australian Financial Review*.

Entering the firm at a mid-level role was quite tricky, Poulton says, because Linklaters accepts about 100 trainees every year, so those applying for jobs externally are competing with a significant number of lawyers vying for internal promotions.

After being hired, Poulton had to retrain in British law to work in litigation. He undertook the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Scheme (now the Solicitors Qualifying Examination) which he said was not unlike the PLT (practical legal training) process in Australia, but more complex. It took nine months to complete. The assessments covered everything from property law through to corporate law, trusts, litigation and criminal law. It cost about £6000, which was paid by Linklaters.

What are salaries like in London?



The salaries that law firms in Britain offer is a key reason London is a consistently popular destination for Australian lawyers.

Rachael Duggan, of recruitment firm Duggan+Della, says her clients typically receive offers with numbers about the same as their Australian salaries, but in British pounds – which is now worth almost double the Australian dollar.

Linklaters trainees typically start on £50,000 (\$95,900), and when they finish their training contract their pay more than doubles to £125,000.

According to an external law survey, partners at Linklaters were paid £1.87 million on average in the last financial year.

What is it like working at Linklaters?

Work hours can be long, but working for Linklaters comes with perks, Poulton says.

“There’s an on-site GP here. There are on-site restaurants and gyms. They really do invest in their staff because they recognise that it’s a high-pressure environment.”

But Poulton’s favourite perk is the team trips. “A whole global practice will often meet in a destination like Berlin or Paris. That gives us a chance to spend time with colleagues in our American or Asian offices for a couple of days. I think that’s really special,” he says.



Andrew Poulton moved to London with his wife six years ago.

One of the hardest parts of Poulton's time in Britain was during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially because it coincided with the arrival of his second child.

"I was allowed in hospital for one hour with my wife when my son arrived, which was immensely difficult," he says.

"But I had six months paid paternity leave in that period, to help my family get through the pandemic, which was so important because we have no relatives over here."

Poulton took the full six months to support his wife and spend time with his family. He says most men at Linklaters take between three and six months as well, a move which studies show helps reduce long-term gender inequality in families.

**8.28AM** – Jul 12, 2023



## Top pay taxed at 22 per cent: Life as a lawyer in Singapore

Ciara Seccombe

A decade ago, corporate lawyer Faith Sing was at a crossroads. Would her next career move be in Australia, the UK or Singapore?

Originally from Singapore, Sing moved to South Australia as a teenager with her family. She went to school in Adelaide and then completed a law degree there.



Faith Sing (pictured far left) and her team at fsLaw.

She then worked for 15 years at several top firms in Sydney and London, including Freehills, Gilbert & Tobin and Linklaters. But in 2013, despite knowing she would have to retrain if she moved back to Singapore, Sing decided that was where she wanted to raise her family.

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



## Why Faith chose Singapore over Australia

"I came [back] for the education system and the opportunity for my children to grow up a little closer to Asia," she says. She and her husband chose to move when their kids were aged five and eight, before they were too old to adjust.

Sing believes having closer ties to Asia will give them long-term advantages due to changes in economic and cultural flows over the coming decades. And she wanted them to grow up in a bilingual environment.

For those with children, the Singapore education system may be a drawcard – Singapore kids regularly top *PISA surveys*, and two Singapore schools are among the top 10 global schools for entry to *Oxbridge*.

Sing then spent one year gaining certification before opening her own boutique firm, *fSLaw*. It specialises in business law advice and employs five lawyers, with plans to expand next year.

## Working as an Australian lawyer in Singapore

Singapore is "quite strict" about who can practise its domestic law, says Sing.

Lawyers with Australian credentials and two or more years of relevant legal experience can become full practitioners in Singapore by passing the Singapore Bar exam parts A and B. If you are a citizen or permanent resident, the two years' experience requirement may be waived.

Australian lawyers can otherwise be employed by a Singapore-based company or law firm, if they obtain a limited licence through registering with the Legal Services Regulatory Authority. Under this arrangement, you cannot practise Singapore law but can offer legal advice in Australian or international law.

## Salaries and income tax

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Salaries in Singapore aren't as predictable as the US, where firms typically follow the Cravath Scale. But recruiter Jonathan Walmsley of Marsden says that Singapore-based lawyers with two years' experience employed at major international firms earn about \$S215,000 (around \$A239,000) compared to between \$110,000 and \$125,000 (including super) in Australia.

While Singaporean salaries don't have the eye-popping numbers you might find elsewhere, Sing and Walmsley says there is hidden value.

"Tax is a big consideration," says Sing. After tax, it's probably "pretty competitive" with remuneration in London or New York, she adds.

The highest bracket in Singapore begins at \$S320,001 and is taxed at 22 per cent. Walmsley estimates lawyers at major international firms with eight years' experience would be earning in this bracket. In contrast, Australia's top bracket begins at \$180,001 and is taxed at \$53,325, plus 45 per cent of anything over that amount.

### Work/life balance in Singapore

Sing also says starting her own firm has allowed her to spend more time with her family.

This became a priority for her after working at a major firm in Sydney, where she typically left for work before her kids were up, and couldn't guarantee she would arrive home before they went to bed.

"Our law firm is quite different – we all work remotely and have done so before COVID. That means no matter how hard I'm working, unless I'm travelling and away, I see my kids every day and have done so for 10 years."

There's another reason Sing can devote herself to her work without sacrificing leisure time, or time with her family.

"I have had a live-in helper for 10 years now. Mine manages the household chores – cooking, cleaning, grocery shopping, finding contractors to fix things."

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This is not uncommon in Singapore, where one in five households have this arrangement.

As for the culture, Sing says your mileage will vary depending on what experiences you seek out. Singapore hosts firms from all around the world, which primarily reflect the culture of the home country, as well as the attitudes of the firm in question. Ms Sing advises Australians who are expecting a cultural change to actively chase new experiences.

“Get out of the office, go to different events, go look at how people do things differently, go into that melting pot and chase that.”

Are you an Australian lawyer overseas? If you'd like to share your story, email [explainers@afrr.com](mailto:explainers@afrr.com)

**12.21PM** – Jul 4, 2023

## Salary a 'significant motivation': Life as an Aussie lawyer at Amazon in Seattle

Ciara Seccombe

In 2017, 29-year-old Daniella Phair was working as a media and technology solicitor at King & Wood Mallesons, when she received a surprising message on LinkedIn.

American Amazon executives were flying to Australia to find a new batch of recruits to take back with them to the tech company's headquarters in Seattle. Might she be interested, the recruiter asked?

It was a "cold-call LinkedIn situation", says Phair, but she decided to give it a shot.



Daniella Phair worked at Amazon in Seattle for four years. **Supplied**

The recruitment process for a job at Amazon



It's part of the US tech giant's Australian recruitment program, which takes place most years (depending on business performance and needs), and the brainchild of a legal VP at the company, who also came from Australia.

The interview experience was tough, says Phair. Hiring involved a phone screen and written assessment before she progressed to hour-long interviews, which were held in-person in Australia by top executives. In the end, around twenty Australian lawyers were hired, and Phair was one of them.

She describes her Amazon salary as a "significant motivation to move".

Her first role at the e-commerce giant was as corporate counsel supporting Amazon's consumer cloud offering, Amazon Photos. In this role, she was responsible for day to day product support on a global scale, including all feature roll-outs, customer escalation and media inquiries.

What it's like to work as a lawyer at Amazon HQ

Phair says the standards are high at Amazon, and the work very fast-paced. She put in similar hours to her work at King & Wood Mallesons.

But she found some key differences between in-house and law firm work.

"[In-house] you provide the advice, and then you are also responsible for the follow through – and you also probably have a bigger emphasis on trying to look around corners and anticipate legal needs." Phair tells *The Australian Financial Review*.

Cross department co-operation is essential, and an ability to network will take you far, she adds.

Working at Amazon also came with unique, canine perk, something that definitely wouldn't fly at a top-tier law firm.



“At least in the Seattle offices at Amazon, dogs are allowed by default!” says Phair. “They aren’t meant to come to meetings but are allowed to be in the desk environment, which is open-plan.”

Socially, she found Americans slightly more formal than her colleagues in Australia.

“It took some time to kind of build up to that camaraderie, the ‘Let’s go for drinks’ vibe that you get more easily in Australia.”

Phair spent four years in Seattle, working in several roles, but she recently returned to Melbourne to take up a legal role with Tennis Australia.

How to get an in-house legal job in the US

She used the E3 visa scheme, a US visa available only to Australians with a job offer. “I couldn’t have worked at a law firm or any other company,” she says, “I had to be a lawyer at Amazon.”

Normally, Australian lawyers in the US must pass the relevant state’s bar exam or receive ‘Admission on Motion’, but in-house corporate lawyers like Phair do not need to sit a bar exam at all.

Working in-house at a major corporation can be a lucrative move in a lawyer’s early career, according to recruiter Jason Elias of Elias Recruitment.

It is easier to get a job working in-house overseas if you already work in-house at an Australian branch of your chosen company, though it is possible to move from law firm work to a company overseas, Elias says.

**10.23AM** – Jun 28, 2023



## Say goodbye to your morning coffee run: life as an Aussie lawyer in Tokyo

When Ashurst senior associate Dario Aloe moved from Melbourne to Tokyo on a client secondment last year, there was one particular habit he had to break.

He had to kiss his morning coffee run goodbye. "It's not really the done thing here," Aloe tells *The Australian Financial Review*. Other than that he has found the culture comparable to work in an Australian firm.



Dario Aloe, a senior associate at Ashurst, is working in Tokyo.

Aloe, 31, has been working for the last 10 months for a Japanese general trading company, Sojitz Corporation, which has a wide business remit, including manufacturing, buying and selling, and exporting and importing goods.



"I found that in my team, there is respect for work-life balance – that taking leave is encouraged, and flexible working practices are a non-issue," says Aloe, 31.

### How Tokyo compares to other big cities

According to Jonathan Walmsley of recruiting firm Marsden, it is harder to get hired to work in Tokyo than in London or the US. It comes down to scale of the market and the size of the international firms in Tokyo affecting the number of positions available in general.

As an international trade hub, there are firms and companies from around the world with offices in Tokyo, meaning that there are opportunities for non-Japanese-speaking lawyers as well. Lawyers working in project finance and corporate law are in areas with the highest demand.

"An Australian corporate lawyer for example might have five to twenty-five options in London for every one or two places in Tokyo," says Walmsley. "Tokyo is a unique market, but we always have interesting roles to work on."

The pay in Japan is generally higher than most global locations and many US firms offer the same rates of pay as in New York, and according to Walmsley. Even with non-US firms, Australians working in Japan typically can expect to earn at least on par with a London salary, which is a significant step up from Australian salaries.

### Cost of living

For Aloe, the cost of living has been comparable to Australia. City rents are more expensive, but he says the food is much cheaper.

"I found certain expenses (such as rent) to be much higher than what I would expect in Melbourne – though I chose to live close to the office and didn't compromise on space," Aloe says.



“Culturally it is more common to eat out for lunch in Tokyo than in Melbourne, with lunches usually around AUD \$10 – the quality of food in Japan is so high that you almost feel guilty when paying this price.”

## How to work as a foreign lawyer

There are several options if you want to work as an Australian lawyer in Japan.

You can act as a registered foreign lawyer in an international firm, or apply to be a *gaikokuho jimusho bengoshi*, which allows you to offer Australian law advisory services while in Japan, so long as you have been qualified in Australia for at least three years, have no criminal record, and have the means to compensate a wronged client for damages.

Japan operates in a civil law framework, unlike Australia. Due to the difference in law and legal systems, Japan does not recognise Australian legal qualifications like other common law countries do. So if an individual wishes to practise Japanese law, they must pass the local bar exam in Japanese language.

Aloe says that because he is working for an international company, he didn't need extra training, or to be fluent in the language.

“Admittedly, I should have learned more, but being able to say “ohayo gozaimasu” [good morning] and “shitsurei shimasu” [said when leaving the office] seems to go a long way,” he says.

## Want to know more about Japan?

An insider's guide to the best places to ski in Japan | With its deep powder snow, weak yen and a host of hotel upgrades, there has never been a better time to book a ski trip to this part of the world.

Visiting Japan? Get some foodie tips from Noma chef Rene Redzepi | As the famed restaurant's pop-up draws to a close, the top cook reflects on the hidden beauty and edible treasures of this mystical Japanese city.



Top city tips from our man in Tokyo | The Japanese capital is a quirky blend of contradictions. Here's our snap guide to this bustling and intriguing city.

**10.21AM** – Jun 28, 2023



## Pay comparable to Bay Area and London: Life as an Aussie lawyer in Singapore

Matthew Yee had several opportunities to follow the conventional path and move to London to practise at a major firm, but his interest in the future of tech drew him elsewhere.

At age 28, he left a job at Minter Ellison in Sydney to work for Clifford Chance in Singapore, before jumping into the thriving Singapore startup space.



Matthew Yee moved to Singapore in 2019.

He now works as a registered foreign lawyer for [Stripe, a digital payments company](#) (valued earlier this year at \$55 billion), supporting the in-person payments team. He helps manage risk and regulations with tech developers and a global legal team as the product develops.



When Yee was getting into tech law, perceptions were still shifting. "It was never viewed as the traditional go-to. People have always viewed M&A or disputes as where you want to be," he says.

But he enjoys working in the tech field, which he says has "a bit more flexibility".

As for Singapore, he sees it as "very cosmopolitan", with a thriving expat community that still manages to leave room for locals.

The travel opportunities are a major draw as well.

"I can get on a plane and be in Bali in two hours, or go to Japan to meet a stakeholder in hours," he says.

From firm work to fintech

Yee feels his background as a lawyer at major Australian firms was the best preparation for working at a startup company.

"It teaches you technical skills, it teaches you discipline, it teaches how to manage commercial stakeholders," he says. "I think when you enter a tech environment it can be very, very messy. And I think you need to have a good footing in the fundamentals."

He credits his time at Clifford Chance as setting him up for success in his current role, allowing him to get a grasp on the framework of Singapore law without having to formally retrain.

Working in tech in Singapore offers salaries comparable to the US Bay Area and London, he says. The [low income tax rate](#) also means he takes more of that money home than people in London or California.

The high pay does come with long hours. Yee often starts work at 7.30am to speak to stakeholders in the US, and the days can run very late. He manages by taking time for

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himself in the middle of the day – when international colleagues are asleep – to go to the gym or take a long lunch.

Renting is expensive in Singapore, and some things that are common in Australia are considered luxuries. Cars run into the [hundreds of thousands of dollars](#), and driving is highly regulated to deter congestion.

However, Yee still feels Singapore is becoming more and more popular with Australians.

“I’d say there are Australians everywhere here,” says Yee. “They realise it’s fantastic for travel. It’s fantastic for career opportunities, the low tax, it’s all kind of like ‘tick, tick, tick’ for them.”

The networking-oriented expat culture has plenty of social groups for people interested in tech and investing.

He encourages like-minded lawyers to consider Singapore over London or New York.

“I think it’s been a fantastic journey,” he says. “I don’t think I would have had the same opportunities if I stayed in private practice in Sydney.”

**10.39AM – Nov 14, 2023**



## The salary/lifestyle trade-off is worth it: Life as an Aussie lawyer in Kenya

Ciara Seccombe

In 2018, Tessa Dignam was trying to work out where to go next when a friend's destination 30th birthday party brought her to Kenya. She fell in love with the country and made plans to move there as soon as she could.

Originally from Adelaide, Dignam studied on the Gold Coast, then got a job in Brisbane before moving to Canberra. Then she began looking for opportunities outside the country.



She got her first taste working overseas after spending a few years at international firm Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner in Abu Dhabi, in their infrastructure team.

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



Then, when Dignam moved to Nairobi, she got a job working for Iseme Kamau and Maema Advocates, a DLA Piper member firm, before moving to her current role, an in-house legal counsel at CrossBoundary, which co-ordinates investment in sustainable energy and infrastructure in Africa and the Middle East.

Her co-workers are mostly Kenyans, but there are a few expats as well.

It isn't easy for foreign lawyers to get jobs in Kenya, which is very protective of its legal fraternity, Dignam says, adding that admission to practise Kenyan law requires naturalisation and fluency in the local language, Swahili. But Dignam works as a legal consultant, instead of an advocate, which has [less stringent requirements](#). In her role she drafts contracts and assists in managing capital.

"I wasn't really a finance lawyer before I moved to Kenya. And now I live and breathe capital."

Some of her favourite projects have involved connecting rare-earths mines, which previously ran on coal, with renewable power.

"Suddenly, these mines are operating on 60 to 70 or 80 per cent renewable energy, which is amazing," she says, "It's a big change and Australia's not even doing that yet."

The trade-off between salary and lifestyle

Dignam has observed that you can find comparable salaries to what you would expect in Australia if you know where to look, especially with the high esteem placed on Western legal education. However, by and large, pay is not as high, and people are expected to work hard.

"I've probably worked harder here than I ever have. Not begrudgingly, I really love my job," she says.

But Dignam and others find themselves choosing to take a pay cut for the lifestyle and culture of Kenya. She says she and her friends see life in Kenya as a perpetual adventure

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and have even spent the odd weekend casually going on safari. It's perhaps not what the locals would do, but as a foreigner, she never stops being amazed by seeing a lion in the flesh, Dignam says.

Kenya's place on the equator also means the weather is "beautiful" all year round.

Furthermore, the cost of living in Nairobi is notably lower than in major cities in Australia. "A bunch of coriander, the last time I was in Coles, was about \$4.50," she says, "Here I can get a bunch as thick as my arm for about 30¢."

There is also a large industry for convenience delivery. "You can run your life from your WhatsApp. You can order groceries and have them delivered within an hour and there's no \$7.95 Australian postage," Dignam says. "I couldn't live this lifestyle anywhere else."

She sees herself in Kenya for the long haul.

"Every day, we get to solve a really hard, scary problem with a lot of cool people in an amazing place. And I think that's quite special."

10.56AM – Nov 7, 2023



## I get paid more and spend less: Life as an Aussie lawyer in South East Asia

Ciara Seccombe

When Maxwell Behan was eight years old, he went on a family trip to Myanmar – and the travel bug stuck.

“I was brought here [in 2004], with my family. My dad’s always been a bit of an adventurer, and it sparked my interest in the region,” he says. The trip sparked a lifelong fascination with South-East Asia, and earlier this year, aged 27, he quit his job at HWL Ebsworth in Sydney to move to Yangon.

After undergoing six interviews over a month, he landed a job as an associate at South-East-Asian firm VDB Loi.



Maxwell Behan: “You grow up a lot in a place like this because of the responsibility you have to take on.”

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



He is currently working on major international deals throughout Asia, including Bangladesh, with foreign companies in transport, energy and infrastructure sectors.

Behan says that being a native English speaker is an advantage in the South-East-Asian market. It often puts him at the forefront of deals he wouldn't see at a junior level in Australia.

"You're where the buck stops. You grow up a lot in a place like this because of the responsibility you have to take on," he says.

The complex financial dynamics at play in the area are also a draw for him.

"[Myanmar] is going through both boom and turmoil at the same time. Between 2010, to around 2021, there was a huge foreign investment boom here. There are a lot of buildings that were built during that time, plus telecommunications, technology, etc."

He plans to stay there long term and hopes to one day be the "go-to guy for deals in this region."

### Salary and perks

Behan makes more money working in Myanmar than he did at a major firm in Sydney. He says lawyers often make between \$115,000 and \$130,000 with two years' post-qualification experience (PQE).

In addition to making more, he spends less. He doesn't often cook or drive anymore because breakfast, lunch, dinner, as well as an Uber to and from work cost only \$15 per day.

His firm also pays for his accommodation and a cleaning service. He lives in an apartment with a rooftop balcony.

Myanmar is usually in the news for its ongoing civil war, but Behan says he has had little exposure to it. Behan says the conflict is contained far away from the capital city.

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(In 2021, the military staged a coup against the democratically elected civil government plunging the country into a political, economic and humanitarian crisis. Since then, it has carried out a violent crackdown on millions of people opposed to its rule. Western countries have sanctioned the junta and its businesses and many foreign firms have cut ties with the country.)

### Industry culture

The laws and legal culture are influenced by regional traditions and culture. Though Behan's field – foreign investment and project finance – is less affected, he has noticed that laws governing contracts often use archaic terms and refer to Buddhist monks and traditions.



Yangon's historic architecture is a drawcard.

For him, the country's charm lies in its history and culture. There are large swaths of untouched nature, and the city's architecture is historical, much of it left over from the British colonial era. People in the streets still wear traditional makeup and donate to monks on the side of the road.



Lunchtime is one of the most important rituals in his office. Instead of eating alone at his desk, no matter how busy things get, Behan and his colleagues all migrate to the tables when the clock strikes 12.

“They all share each other’s food,” says Behan. “You actively pick from other people’s boxes of these little dishes that they’ve all prepared. And they love to share with each other.”

Food is friendship in Yangon. “Instead of asking ‘how are you?’ they’ll ask ‘have you eaten?’” says Behan.

The Yangon lawyers also swap out the sacred Sydney coffee run for a trip to the tea shop for Burmese black tea, which is served strong and sweet with condensed milk.

### Travel and nightlife

Behan is also excited to explore the local travel opportunities. It’s only a 45-minute flight from Yangon to Bangkok, and only about \$100 per trip on the local airlines.

The office typically clears out between 5.30 and 6pm, but the nightlife has a unique local twist. There is a military curfew in place from midnight to 3am, and many places shut their doors at 10 or 11pm. But the committed party people of Yangon have found a way around it.

“What they do is if they’re at a bar or nightclub when the curfew comes, they’ll stay inside the bar or nightclub until 3 or 4am, and then go home,” says Behan. “It’s pretty wild.”

Are you an Australian lawyer overseas? If you’d like to share your story, email [explainers@afrc.com](mailto:explainers@afrc.com)

10.02AM – Oct 31, 2023



## 'I don't want to be cancelled by the people of Houston': Life as an Aussie lawyer in Texas

Maxim Shanahan

Big cars and big highways made Australian lawyer Stefanie Szabo feel at home when she moved with her family from Dubai to Houston earlier this year.

Szabo, who works in-house at Norwegian multinational DNV, says that she had never previously considered the US as a viable option for an Australian lawyer.



Houston lawyer Stefanie Szabo looked overseas when she saw colleagues trapped in the senior associate path.

"The impression I had was that it was hard to move across unless you had qualified and registered in a specific state."

However, a Texas scheme whereby in-house lawyers can work for two years before needing to qualify locally is making the Lone Star State an increasingly attractive

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destination for foreign lawyers, drawn by the large number of tech and resources companies based in Austin and Houston respectively.

## Dubai over London

When Szabo saw colleagues beginning to lock themselves into the senior associate pathway and out of career flexibility, she figured it was the right time to head overseas. "They would say, we can't really move firms now, we're about to be promoted."

Szabo left MinterEllison's Brisbane office in 2012, at age 28, but eschewed the well-trodden path to London. With the overseas legal market "not particularly buoyant" post-GFC and "not really screaming out for Aussie lawyers", Szabo jumped at the opportunity to head to Dubai with leading international firm Clifford Chance.

After four years at the firm, with the long work hours and hectic travel schedule that came with international litigation, Szabo made the move in-house. But, with her role at DNV in Dubai covering everywhere from Cairo to Canberra, the transition was far from a step down in intensity.

"There's a different kind of pressure. You're no longer a baby lawyer working under a senior associate or partner, you're *the* legal. You're expected to hit the ground running, know the business and advise them differently to how you would have done in private practice," Szabo says.

## Houston life

Szabo's new role, covering the Americas, makes for a slightly more manageable and logical geographic purview. "It's completely different, and it's an interesting professional opportunity," she says.

"But I haven't been able to make any trips to Brazil or somewhere cool like that just yet."



Houston's spread-out nature – “it's just massive” – means that the expat community presents itself less readily than in Dubai, where “people come from anywhere”, Szabo says.

“We [foreign lawyers] are dotted all around the city depending on where your corporate HQ is located. But there are a lot of people who come here because of all the large multinational companies.”

Everything, except the expat community, is bigger in Texas. “The square footage on the homes is massive,” Szabo says. “We're rattling around in our home.” Because of its spread-out, suburban nature, it is harder to naturally stumble across entertainment options and things to do with her young family.

“But I'm still new! I don't want the people of Houston to cancel me – I'm sure it's there, I just haven't found it yet.

“People are very friendly, and that southern-style hospitality really does exist,” Szabo says.

Work, work, work

The most notable difference in legal culture, Szabo says, has been the reluctance of American lawyers at local firms and companies to take holidays.

“They take the shortest holidays. Being at a European company and coming from the Middle East – where they both really respect the summer break – American lawyers feel like they have to really justify taking seven to 10 days off.”

Fewer holidays doesn't translate into fewer working hours either, which are comparable to Australia and the Middle East.

Spending all that time in the office, it's not surprising then that Australian lawyers are highly regarded by Americans. “Aussies are seen as easy-going and good to get along with. And often they just like to hear an Australian accent,” says Szabo.

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As for pay, the weak Australian dollar is a definite advantage. A good salary for a mid-level in-house legal counsel averages between \$US150,000-\$US180,000 (\$235,000-\$280,000), and can vary depending on the size of the company.

10.13AM – Oct 24, 2023



## Life as a lawyer to the stars in New York's 'cut-throat' legal world

Maxim Shanahan

In the cut-throat world of New York City commercial law, Sydneysider Nick Saady finds himself acting as a "shoulder to lean on" for clients one minute, and alongside them in Vegas the next.

Saady is an associate at Pryor Cashman, a mid-sized media and entertainment law firm. He advises an eclectic group of clients, who include Hollywood stars, DJs, record-label bigwigs and sports leagues. In his spare time, he plays for the New York Kookaburras Cricket Club.



Sydneysider Nick Saady increased his salary five-fold when he landed a job in New York

All of that leaves him with an average of three to four hours' sleep, and an office he describes as his sometime living quarters.

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



## Hustling to get in the door

Saady moved to New York five years ago, after two years at Freehills, to study a Master of Laws at New York University. "I was like, this is amazing ... I need to try and get a job here so I can stay and build a career here," he says.

He focused on building a network while studying, describing it as "almost impossible" to get a litigation job in New York without local qualifications or experience – "unless you're doing something where they just need warm bodies".

"I had to hustle pretty hard just to get in the interview room," Saady says, recalling how he sent more than 50 emails to make connections in the city.

He eventually secured an interview with leading white-shoe firm Davis Polk, and was promptly put through the wringer. The process consisted of six interviews with partners and associates on the same day. "It was intense," he says. But with a job offer within the day, and the Bar exam passed courtesy of a 27-day lock-in, Saady was off.

## A cut-throat legal culture

Saady says working in New York is "incredibly different" to Australia. "It's incredibly highly charged, and everyone is ridiculously aggressive ... Everything is high stakes, and there's constant pressure."

He moved from Davis Polk to Pryor Cashman to work in the entertainment industry, and says the nature of his client base raises the stakes of his work.

"Because you're representing celebs, artists and record labels, everything is public. So if there's an issue or a misstep, you have a big problem."

Clients also expect more of their lawyers in the United States, says Saady. Whereas engaging a lawyer is seen as a last port of call in Australian business, American clients expect round-the-clock availability.



"I'll have clients ring me up just to talk about commercial matters," he says. "There's that closeness because you are like a sounding board for them. A guide."

Saady found himself taking on a more business-focused role, acting as a "shoulder to lean on", and he has learnt to move beyond plain legal advice and approach client matters from a commercial and reputational standpoint.

### Partner pay and Vegas trips

With great client expectations comes great pay. Saady says his salary increased five-fold when he landed the job at Davis Polk, and was earning as much as many junior partners in top-tier Australian firms as a third-year associate in New York.

That's reflected in the [hours put in](#), with all-nighters far from rare. The omnipresence of the client has crept into his social life – he has an "eclectic social circle" with various music, hospitality and Hollywood connections.

"There's an immersion of social life with work, especially when you're in the entertainment industry. Everyone's having a good time – most of the time."

While time off work is hard to come by – "when you have clients, you can't just leave" – Saady plans to travel to Ibiza and Mykonos with clients next year, and his work regularly takes him to Las Vegas.

As for what happens in Vegas? That's client-lawyer privilege.

9.17AM – Oct 19, 2023

## This Aussie lawyer went from the ACCC to working for the UN

Maxim Shanahan

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It was a plan to “spend a year learning Italian, eating food and living by the sea” that led Maggie Abou-Rizk from a career in competition law to criss-crossing the globe leading investigations for UNICEF from Budapest.

Having caught the travel bug when working in London for a year during the GFC – “the most horrible time to be trying to find a job” – Abou-Rizk found herself back in Australia working on telecommunications regulation.



“Extremely rewarding work”: Maggie Abou-Rizk, UNICEF’s head of investigations .

“At the back of my mind, I really wanted to be overseas,” she tells *The Australian Financial Review*. Aged 30, and with many countries having a cut-off of 31 for working holiday visas, Abou-Rizk decided to move to Italy on little more than a whim.

“Italy’s kind of cool, I’m going to move there,” she decided, with little knowledge of the language and no job lined up. “Everyone told me that was a horrible idea.”

With three UN agencies headquartered in Rome, and a childhood interest in the organisation, Abou-Rizk sent out applications for a year while “teaching English and eating pasta”.

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With less than a month before her visa ran out, a job offer finally materialised.

Thrown in the deep end

Despite being thrown into a “totally different” area of law and panicking about whether she could do the job, Abou-Rizk says the skills she learnt in corporate roles in Australia were transferable to United Nations work.

Legislation, procedures and jurisprudence are different, but the basic process of gathering evidence, looking at jurisprudence and preparing arguments that support the client’s position remain the same, she says.

Abou-Rizk began in administrative international law, but soon moved into investigations, inquiring into alleged misconduct and fraud by UNICEF employees and partners.

Most lawyers who have moved into the UN come from prosecution backgrounds, and corporate experience is “not common”, she says. Her experience in an investigative role at the ACCC and an understanding of contract principles gave “a level of insight that you might not have if you come from a prosecution background”.

‘Places you wouldn’t go for a holiday’

Working for the UN necessarily requires a lot of travel, and it remains “one of the things I find most enjoyable”, Abou-Rizk says.

Investigations have taken her to places including Syria, Sudan, Chad and Nigeria. “Basically, places you wouldn’t normally be going for a holiday, which presents its own challenges. But you really do get to see a different side of the world.”

Working in difficult environments on often sensitive matters requires an appreciation of local norms, and a sensitivity to risk, “to ensure that you’re not putting anyone in harm’s way while you’re conducting an investigation”. That can be one of the most challenging aspects of the job, Abou-Rizk says.



“When I was doing investigations at the ACCC ... those weren’t factors you had to take into account.”

Despite the challenges, there are rewards: “Going out into the field and seeing the impact of the work [UNICEF does] is the sort of thing that keeps me motivated.

“Probably the most impactful time was going to Syria during the war. It puts things into perspective when you see the resilience of people and their determination to keep working and keep working for the UN with everything that is going on around them.”

Travel for fun

While work travel can be intense, working as a lawyer at the UN has its own advantages: normal working hours (most of the time), colleagues from all parts of the globe, and – being based in Europe – the ability to “jump on a plane on the weekend and have a great time somewhere else for not a lot of money”.

Indeed, the size of the organisation lends itself to mobility: in a 10-year career, Abou-Rizk has worked out of Rome, Geneva, Vienna and Budapest across various agencies.

As for pay, “it’s not a job that I do for the cash”.

“But there are many benefits to the work that [UNICEF] does that I find extremely rewarding. I don’t think there could be a stronger mandate than helping kids in need. That’s why I’m doing this job.”

9.33AM – Oct 5, 2023



## Private social clubs and sailing: What this Aussie lawyer loves about NYC

It is a truth universally acknowledged that an Aussie expat lawyer in search of a good fortune will consider a job in New York.

Thanks to the enormous salaries, high prestige and cultural allure of the city, New York has become one of the most popular destinations for Australian legal professionals seeking work abroad.



Duncan McKay, a Sydney native, has spent the past eight years working in New York. He started his career at King & Wood Mallesons, moving between Sydney and Hong Kong. When an opportunity came up to join US firm Kirkland off the back of a transaction he had worked on, he took the leap. He now works as a partner for international law firm Fried Frank, which has its headquarters in New York.

The US is less strict about who can practise its domestic law than many other countries, provided foreign lawyers pass the bar exam (which varies by state).



McKay says lawyers tend to spend four to six weeks preparing for the New York bar exam, and costs are subsidised by their firm. It is a minor hurdle that, combined with the relative similarity between the two legal systems, makes it an appealing prospect for Australian lawyers.

There is another reason the US is such a popular choice.

In 2021, first-year lawyers at top-ranking US firms were estimated to be earning [double what](#) they would in Australia. By their fifth year in the US, that could reach about \$US345,000 (\$545,540) plus bonuses.

Jonathan Walmsley, of Marsden group, says a first-year lawyer at a top-tier firm in the US (typically Australian lawyers with two years of experience would be viewed at this level) would be paid \$US215,000 a year, and a typical bonus of \$US20,000 in line with the [Cravath Scale](#).

"I don't think it's any secret that working in big law can be lucrative, very lucrative," says McKay. "But understand the demands and the pressures that are placed on lawyers working at this level and in this environment are enormous."

Opera and sailing

Young professionals often spend what leisure time they have in New York City's social clubs. McKay is now a board member in the Metropolitan Opera Club, which was founded in 1893, after getting his start in the University Club.

"I think New York City is a wonderful, dynamic place to live. There is always something new to do," he says. "It's a melting pot for young professionals, and the social opportunities here are amazing.

"It's like you have the best of everything at your fingertips. Maybe not the beautiful Sydney beaches, but, you know, certainly in terms of art, culture, music, restaurants, and just outside of the city, the beautiful park lands and waterways."



When he's not attending operas, he spends his spare time sailing his boat between Newport and New York.

But, McKay warns that working as a lawyer in New York City is "certainly not for the faint of heart".

"People are playing for keeps in New York. You have to want to be here, to work hard ... But certainly, if you're here with purpose, then there's no limit."

### Land of Opportunity

McKay says the entrepreneurial culture fostered by NYC's law firms is one of the biggest appeals of living and working in the city. Since moving there, he has developed a niche in fund financing for private equity clients, where he advises on fund structures across different asset classes including infrastructure and real estate.

"If you have a practice area, or an area of the law that you're interested in, and you think there's a business case for it, these firms allow you an opportunity to really dive headfirst into that, in a way that might be more challenging in the Australian market," he says.

"[American] firms are much more agile in the way that they deploy resources to new opportunities."

But McKay hints that the hours are long if you aim for the top in New York.

"There's really no limit to what you can achieve here in the law, and your trajectory is pretty much in your own hands. It's about repetition, it's about the volume. It's about how hard you're prepared to work. And so really, you are the master of your own destiny."

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10.07AM – Sep 26, 2023

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## This 'expat hub' offers high salaries and travel opportunities: Life as a lawyer in Bahrain

Ciara Seccombe

Mubeen Khadir first moved to Bahrain from Melbourne at age 34 to establish and lead EY's international and transaction tax practice.

In 2011, after three years, he moved back to Australia, but a few years later returned to the Middle East – this time to Saudi Arabia – to work for KPMG.



Mubeen Khadir has made the successful transition to a career at KPMG in Bahrain.

After several other stints, including with Deloitte, Khadir is now a partner and head of tax and corporate services at KPMG Bahrain.

Khadir helps clients with corporate, international and M&A tax issues as well as advising on insolvency and liquidation and setting up companies. These clients have his mobile number, and can call at any hour.

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Although Khadir himself practises in English, the office has about 20 people with different nationalities, which allows them to present reports in other languages such as Arabic if clients request it.

### Salary perks

One of the reasons Khadir moved back to the Middle East was because he couldn't make as much money if he stayed in Australia.

Khadir says junior lawyers in Bahrain earn more than they would in Australia, but the gap widens even more as lawyers advance in their careers.

"It would be almost impossible to even come close to finding a job that would pay me [this well], even if I was a partner in Australia," he tells *The Australian Financial Review*.

"[Salaries] the lower levels (say three to four years of post-qualification experience) up to senior associate (six to 10 years of experience) would be between 25 per cent to 40 per cent higher than in Australia. At the partner level they would be anywhere from 50 per cent higher to double what you may make in Australia," he says.

The deal is further sweetened by the lack of personal income tax.

### Workplace culture

Khadir says one of the most noticeable differences about working in Bahrain is the emphasis on personal, friendly relations with colleagues.

"In Bahrain, generally you go to a meeting, and you may spend the first sort of 45 minutes, just talking about life, family, what they've been up to, geopolitics and various other things," he says. "And then the last 15 or 20 minutes actually talking about the work."



Another key difference is the integration of Bahraini culture in the workplace. During Ramadan, office hours are reduced to six hours a day. People use the extra time to socialise.

“You’ll find a lot of cafes where people are watching football [soccer] and smoking shisha, socialising, and a lot of charitable activities go on during that month.”

### Lifestyle factors

Another major appeal of living in Bahrain is the reduced commute time. Despite a lack of public transport, peak hour only lasts about an hour in the small nation, and many people actually go home for lunch.

“If my kids have got a school production or a recital, you could literally duck back to school at three o’clock, listen, and then come back to the office,” Khadir says.

Family and leisure time are easier to come by as well due to the widespread employment of domestic helpers, a practice that Khadir says has allowed him to pick up squash and go out more during the week.

Bahrain’s position in the Gulf also makes travel to various places around the world more convenient than Australia.

“[It’s] six hours to London or Paris, so we do a lot of holidays in Europe. And the region, sort of being Turkey or Jordan, there’s a lot of a lot of travelling to do. And we get five weeks of annual leave a year, plus a lot of public holidays as well.”

### The expat bubble

Unlike almost anywhere in the world, Bahrain is home to [more expats than nationals](#). In fact, it can be hard to meet locals in everyday life.

Khadir says that most Bahrainis work in the private sector, although about 60 per cent of his KMPG branch are local employees.

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Most of Khadir's friends are expats – mostly from the UK, US, India, Pakistan and Australia.

“Schools are the easiest place to make friends,” says Khadir, who has two school-aged children.

His advice for professionals with families looking to work internationally?

“It's very important that your spouse is happy, or your partner's happy. I think that can make or break the move.”

10.11AM – Sep 19, 2023



## \$180,000 for two years' experience: Life as an Aussie lawyer in Abu Dhabi

Ciara Seccombe

At age 27, Ashurst competition lawyer Adelle Elhosni headed off to Abu Dhabi for a secondment to an Emirati client as their in-house counsel. It was meant to be a short stay, and then COVID-19 struck.

Elhosni decided to stay on, and she has not looked back. In her role she monitors the activities of competition regulators in the region.



Adelle Elhosni, a competition associate with Ashurst working in Abu Dhabi.

Elhosni did not have to retrain in local law, but she is required to attend regular learning and professional development sessions hosted by Ashurst to work in Abu Dhabi. One limitation is that [foreign lawyers cannot appear before Emirati courts](#).

Salaries 'higher than Australia'

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Source: Australian Financial Review, Careers blog by [Ciara Seccombe](#), published 12 July - 22 Aug 2023



The UAE also requires lawyers to obtain a valid work visa. Lawyers with a valid employment contract can apply for a skilled “green” visa, which has a [2280 dirham \(\\$969.45\) application fee](#), and is valid for five years. Ashurst took care of this for Elhosni.

Elhosni says certain minimum visa requirements such as comprehensive health insurance cover by your employer come as an “added benefit” of working in the UAE.

Working in the UAE is lucrative for Australian lawyers as well. Elhosni says “salaries are typically higher than those paid to Australian lawyers and are more aligned with London scales”.

Sonia Patel of legal recruitment firm Marsden agrees. Patel sees lawyers with two years post-qualification experience moving to the UAE and earning \$170,000 to \$187,000, which rises to \$195,000 to \$280,000 at five years. These salaries are even higher for lawyers working at the office of a major US or “magic circle” firm. The lack of income tax is a bonus.



Adelle Elhosni, a competition associate with Ashurst

Abu Dhabi has a high cost of living, even higher than Elhosni’s hometown of Sydney. Accommodation in particular can be very expensive. A one-bedroom apartment in the city centre costs an [average of 5800 dirham a month](#) (\$2365). However, the higher salaries make the difference manageable, she says.

Lifestyle allure

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Elhosni describes the industry culture as “not too dissimilar to Australia,” although finds the local culture also embedded into her workplace.

“While I predominantly practise in English, the Emirati culture including the Arabic language, local customs and holidays are well respected and observed across all aspects of life, including in our work” she says. “For example, over the Ramadan period the UAE offices organise an office dinner where families and friends gather to break the fast together.”

The weather also plays a bigger role in the workplace. Elhosni sees a noticeable difference during summer, where most employees take advantage of the firm’s flexible work arrangements to escape the heat at home.

“While I often do find myself in the office most days (as we have a particularly tight-knit group and a great culture overall), during the summer I do tend to escape for a few weeks, including some time working remotely.” she says.

Elhosni also found that the UAE “by far exceeded” her expectations as a woman in the workplace, with many women in positions of power and special events dedicated to helping women build their careers and find support at work.

She also appreciates the travel opportunities in the region, and often takes the chance to explore.

Her favourite trips include visiting the freshwater wadis in Oman and hiking in the northern emirates.

“The UAE desert landscape and star filled night skies are also breathtaking.” she says.



## IP lawyers are driving Ferraris in Beijing

Ciara Seccombe

Thirty years ago, Matthew Murphy would sit at a yum cha restaurant in Brisbane, practising with staff the Chinese he'd learnt off cassette tapes.

"A lot of people thought that it might be better to learn French or one of the Romance languages, and then head off to London like everyone else seemed to do back then. But I really saw the potential, fairly early, in China," Murphy tells *The Australian Financial Review*.



Matthew Murphy has been working in China for many years.

Murphy moved to Hong Kong when he was 26. He would travel to Beijing and Shanghai once a week or so, but he didn't move there because in the 1990s, the mainland offices were "pretty much just postboxes".

He runs his own practice, MMLC Group, working between Beijing and his hometown, Brisbane.

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Murphy's specialties are Chinese intellectual property, corporate competition and technology. He advises on mergers and acquisitions, restructuring and foreign direct investments.

### How it all started

Murphy's extended family had lived in Hong Kong, and growing up he had spent years listening to stories of their school excursions into China and the region's growing potential.

"There was a real vibe in China, they used to tell me," he says. By about age 15, he recalls, "I could sense that things were definitely on the rise."

Foreign lawyers did not necessarily need Chinese language skills to work in the region then. Today, though, it would be difficult to get a job in China without strong language skills.

Murphy says an internship in China or Hong Kong significantly increases Australians' chances of landing a full-time gig there.

### Salaries in China

When Murphy moved in 1997 to work for the London-based Simmons & Simmons in Hong Kong and China, the firm offered him four times what he made in Australia. He says salaries have since levelled off.

Nevertheless. Murphy says there's a "three-tier system" when it comes to lawyers' salaries in China.

On the top tier are the large British and American firms that pay top dollar to expats and locals.

On the second tier are Chinese firms, which typically pay 20 or 30 per cent less than the big internationals, although they still offer good money.

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Then there are Chinese boutique firms that offer a wide range of salaries, which are generally lower than the others.

“You’ll meet good-quality Chinese lawyers in Beijing with five to 10 years’ experience at the associate junior partner level who are on \$US70,000 (\$109,000) a year. You meet that same person working for a boutique firm in Shanghai or Beijing or Guangzhou, and they’ll only be on \$US40,000.”

It also depends on the area of law you practise, and the quality of your network.

“Some IP lawyers are driving Ferraris in Beijing these days,” Murphy says.

Two shifts a day

As a China-based international lawyer, Murphy’s hours are intense. He works a “two-shift” day, planned around the people he works with in other timezones.

“I’m often having conference calls by 5am Beijing time until about 6.30am,” he says.

After the early-morning calls, he goes for a run and heads into his office. The staff have internal meetings while their foreign clients are asleep, around midday China time.

Murphy enthuses about many aspects of the Beijing lifestyle that make it worth it, such as going out for long lunches and taking tea with clients and colleagues.

There are challenges for Australian lawyers who want to work in China. [Foreigners cannot practise Chinese law, or be admitted to the bar](#). Foreign firms may set up branches in China but may only act as foreign or international legal advisers. Furthermore, foreign lawyers cannot speak on the record in court.

“I’ll need to have a Chinese lawyer there to essentially regurgitate what I’ve said about the Chinese law and get it officially on the record from a Chinese lawyer. So, it’s a complicated set-up. I mean, international lawyers in China still, technically speaking, aren’t meant to advise on Chinese law.”

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Murphy says there is a social divide between expats and Chinese lawyers.

“[Chinese lawyers] essentially have to agree to be members of the Communist Party,” he says, “whereas the international lawyers, expats like myself, don’t have to deal with that side of things, and we tend to be fairly independent.”

Murphy believes there is a strong respect for Australian professionals in China.

“I think [Australians are] are put on a par with the US-trained lawyers out of the top law schools, and the UK-trained lawyers as well.”

Are you an Australian lawyer overseas? If you’d like to share your story, email [explainers@afrc.com](mailto:explainers@afrc.com)

**9.09AM** – Sep 5, 2023



## \$90,000 and a mandated coffee break: Life as a lawyer in Stockholm

Ciara Seccombe

It was after a moot competition at university in Perth that Jake Lowther, 35, realised he wanted to work overseas in arbitration.

He now lives in Stockholm, Sweden, working as a legal counsel at the SCC Arbitration Institute – an institution for international arbitration affiliated with the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce.



Jake Lowther lives and works as a lawyer in Stockholm.

“In my day to day, I am taking decisions on the management of cases, preparing memoranda and proposals for the consideration of the SCC board on questions such as jurisdiction, advances on cost and appointment of arbitrators, attending meetings, events, and conferences to promote the SCC Arbitration Institute, and drafting articles on arbitration law,” he told *The Australian Financial Review*.

From Perth to Stockholm

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After finishing his degree, Lowther first got a job at Ashurst in Perth working in employment, M&A and infrastructure.

But that exposure to arbitration during university, as well as some international cases at Ashurst, encouraged him to undertake a master's degree in international dispute resolution in Berlin, Germany.

Lowther then worked in Seoul in South Korea as foreign legal specialist in the international division of the Korean Commercial Arbitration Board, before taking a job in Stockholm at a law firm, Magnusson Law. Earlier this year, he joined the SCC Arbitration Institute.

### Australian lawyers in Sweden

Lowther says the Swedish legal industry is tougher to break into than in other popular countries, but not impossible. He knows many Australian expats working there at local firms and in-house, and even one Aussie working as a junior judge at the Swedish Supreme Administrative Court.

"Australians' reputation as hardworking and down-to-earth fits well into the local social dynamic and office culture," Lowther says.

Most offices also operate in Swedish, and as such, knowledge of the language will make a huge difference in gaining employment and fitting in socially. Lowther finds that while most of his colleagues can speak English, they are more "open and relaxed" in their native tongue. There are, however, intensive language programs that foreign-qualified lawyers can access, and he has gained proficiency through both lessons and immersion.

### Salary and culture

Lowther says that Australian lawyers looking to work in Sweden "should not expect a London or New York salary".

Unlike Australia, salary in Sweden is calculated on a monthly basis, rather than annually.



According to figures from lawyers and business professionals union Akavia, the gross median monthly salary for lawyers in 2023 was about SEK53,000, equivalent to just under \$90,000 per annum. The gross average law firm salary about \$105,000 per annum. In-house counsel typically earn more than external counsel.

Lowther says that despite the more modest salaries, the lifestyle of a Swedish lawyer makes it worth his while.

He spends most of his day attending meetings, events, and conferences on behalf of the institute, and drafting articles on arbitration law. However, there's an element of Swedish culture that captivates him in the hours between.

"*Fika* [the traditional Swedish coffee break] is taken with the team at least once per day, and the whole office gathers for breakfast together on Fridays," he says.

In Sweden, this is not just a coffee break, but a way of life. The custom promotes social connection, improved productivity and mental wellbeing, and some Swedish companies even [write fika breaks into employment contracts](#).

Lowther also finds time for regular tennis and swimming sessions.

During winter, there are only a few hours of sunlight each day, so Swedes look forward to, and make the most of, the bright, warm summer months while they can.

"Under Swedish law, an employee is entitled to take up to four weeks of annual leave in one go between June and August," says Lowther.

During this time, he has also taken to exploring different islands in the local archipelago, and enjoying the cultural life of the city, which includes museums and local rooftop bars.

Are you an Australian lawyer overseas? If you'd like to share your story, email [explainers@afr.com](mailto:explainers@afr.com)

**12.27PM** – Aug 29, 2023

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## How this Aussie lawyer ended up working on a tiny tax haven island off France

Ciara Seccombe

In central London, near the Smithfield Market from Oliver Twist, you will find Australian expat lawyer Michael Whitbread at his home office, working two jobs.

He works remotely as senior legal counsel for Melbourne-based AI company Vesparum, and, on the side, resolves workplace disputes for employees on Guernsey, a small, picturesque island in the English Channel with a population of just 65,000.



Michael Whitbread moved from Sydney to London. Mario Guzman

Whitbread, 40, is an employment and tech lawyer from Newcastle, who worked in-house and at major firms in Australia before he moved to the UK at age 32, where he joined multinational firm Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer – one of five member firms that form the prestigious UK Magic Circle.



Then in 2017, he took a job with offshore law firm Mourant in Guernsey, the second-largest island in the Channel Islands off the north-west coast of France. The group of islands isn't part of the UK, but a dependent territory of the British Crown. Guernsey is also a popular tax haven for the wealthy.

"I was in a fortunate position," Whitbread says. "I didn't have any children or extended family to look after or anything like that. So, I really made career decisions based on my own preferences."



Saint Peter Port, the capital of Guernsey. McPhoto/Protze / Alamy Stock Photo

"It's a physically stunning place – just google Saint Peter Port or the Bluebell Woods to see what I'm talking about. Professionally, people are very welcoming, and it is possible to progress much more quickly professionally than onshore," Whitbread says.

He was far from being the only Australian on the island, despite it being remote and relatively small.

"[There are] loads. Australians, Kiwis and South Africans are all over the offshore world – for example, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Bermuda, Cayman and British Virgin Islands – as



well as mid-shore – Hong Kong, Singapore and United Arab Emirates. I'd like to see Australia do a better job acknowledging its very large overseas diaspora," he says.

Following a stint on nearby island Jersey, which Whitbread says is much more like the UK, he moved back to London in 2022.

He is still chairman of the Guernsey Employment Discrimination Tribunal and flies back to the island for hearings. It's a part-time role, which involves resolving employment complaints such as unfair dismissal, discrimination and minimum wage issues.

He also works full-time as senior legal counsel with Australian company Vesparum. He has a flexible work arrangement that allows him to stay in the UK, but also gives him more opportunities to visit his family back home in Australia. It's also allowed him to branch out from pure privacy and employment law and learn more about the tech industry.

Whitbread believes now is a pivotal time for the field, given both the explosion of tech developments, and the Australian government [review](#) of the Privacy Act, which aims to update data protection and security for the 21st century.

Whitbread thinks Australia can learn a lot from Europe's privacy laws. As the Australian law stands, companies that experience a data breach do not need to report to customers whose data was compromised, as long as they rectify the breach and conclude that it did not pose "serious risk of harm".

Whitbread compares this to letting students mark their own homework. In Europe, all breaches leading to unlawful processing must be reported to the national information commissioner within 72 hours.

Whitbread says it is history that drives Europe's approach to privacy and tech law.

"I've been to the Stasi Museum [in Berlin]. They could haul people out of their homes in the middle of the night, no explanation [...] throw them in a room, interview them, take bodily samples ... So, that explains why the Germans, in particular, are just not having some of the liberties that US tech companies are allowed to take."

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Whitbread says Australia might not share the same history, but we face the same choices, which will affect our economy and national identity into the future.