



# A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Want to work in one city but live in another? Take your cue from the super-commuters, says *Hannah James*



**S**ydney versus Melbourne. It's an age-old rivalry and perhaps it's finally being settled in the best possible way – let's brandish our tacos like the little girl in the TV ad and ask: why not have both? More than 130,000 Australians who love living in their home city, but work in a different state, are doing just that. Extreme commuting, where a worker travels more than 100km to work, rose 37 per cent between 2006 and 2011. And the Sydney to Melbourne commute, which has long been the busiest air route in Australia, accounts for a large proportion of that rise. "There's a real pattern of it happening across the board," says Andrew Henderson,

co-founder of creative agency Pencil & Pixel. A Melburnian by birth, Henderson moved to Sydney 13 years ago and was the creative director of David Jones for 10 years, before launching his own company. "My business partner is based in Melbourne, and two years ago we decided to open a business that bridges both cities," he says. "It's flourishing in both places, more so in Melbourne, but I have a preference to live in Sydney, so I'm commuting back and forth." He's not the only one in his social circle to do so. "I realised last year that my neighbours either side of me commute to Melbourne, too. I've got old colleagues from David Jones who are commuting, I've got new friends who are commuting... It's

like a corporate fly-in, fly-out; airfares are cheap and business demands that you be in a couple of places. Everyone has a story and a way to make it work." His own system, he explains, "is all about minimising the hideousness of the flight. I fly on Sunday afternoon to avoid the peak, and get in and out as fast as I can. I drive a motor scooter to the airport – the best-kept secret in Sydney is that there's free scooter and motorcycle parking just across from Qantas valet check-in. I walk straight from the scooter onto the plane." He also has a formula for the trip: "I sit up the front, on the aisle; I've got noise-cancelling headphones and I do some work or listen to a podcast. I text my regular Uber

driver so he picks me up on time. Then I travel back in the afternoon on Thursday, before 4pm, so I'm home for the weekend." The in-flight "hideousness" which Henderson works hard to reduce is exactly what the start-up Airly aims to abolish when it launches later this year. It will offer unlimited flights on eight-seater planes between suburban airports (Bankstown in Sydney, Essendon in Melbourne) for a monthly fee of \$2550. Airly co-founder Alexander Robinson promises a time saving of two hours per trip, culled from check-in and security procedures. "If you fly three or four trips a month, that gives you back up to 12 eight-hour days a year," he says. It was Robinson's own frequent flying for his previous job that led to his desire to

a wallet and phone. I buy two of everything – two bikes, two sets of running shoes. It's about enjoying both worlds and not feeling like you're away on a business trip." Fellow super-commuter Lucinda Pitt, head of communications for make-up retailer Mecca, loves the two-city lifestyle, too. "I get excited about both ends of the commute," she says. "I'm from Sydney and reluctant to leave, so I work from home for a week, then I do a week in Melbourne." Pitt bases herself at The Olsen hotel while working at Mecca HQ in Melbourne. "As a working mum of one, I love the idea of being looked after for a few nights a month – any mother I tell says, 'Oh my god, that must be so fantastic'. But by Friday morning, I can't wait to get back to my son."



**FLIGHT PLAN**  
Super-commuters Andrew Henderson (above) and Lucinda Pitt (left) have nailed interstate work travel.

## "I BUY TWO OF EVERYTHING – TWO BIKES, TWO SETS OF RUNNING SHOES"



improve the experience for other travellers. "I found the demands extremely tiring," he admits. "And the amount of unproductive time while in airports was draining." He says it's employees' personal lives that suffer. Future commuters may be able to avoid the airport altogether, if Australia ever gets its mooted high-speed rail. Earlier this month, vice-chairman of the International High Speed Rail Association, Torkel Patterson, told a government committee that the time is right to start planning the long-discussed rail service, which would take two to three hours instead of the current 11. Hold your (mechanical) horses, though, trainspotters: that won't be a viable option for who-knows-how-many years. So until Airly launches later this year, frequent flyers are stuck with what Henderson calls "the bum-in-the-face factor" of planes. "That's the downside." Henderson's secret to making it work, however, is that, quite simply, he enjoys it. "I decided, without being excessive, to make it comfortable. That's why it's working – it's good fun." To that end, soulless business hotels aren't for him; instead, he has an apartment in Melbourne's South Yarra. "I keep clothes there, so I just carry a laptop,

Her routines are as efficient as Henderson's, although the details vary. Flying early Monday mornings, she's at work by 10.15am, and back on Friday afternoon to pick up her son, who's nine, from after-school care. He lives with his Sydney-based father, Pitt's ex-husband, during the week. "The downside is the dead time, and so I try to be efficient with my time on the plane, and in the back of an Uber; I catch up on the newspapers, emails, any reading I have to do for work." The other negative: "You're always in the wrong place at the wrong time. You can't have FOMO because you're always missing something – someone's birthday, a great training opportunity at work, or my son's swimming carnival. You've just got to work around that." She's now used to planning out her social life with military precision, pinning down friends four weeks in advance. "I'm not as spontaneous as I'd like, but you have to be organised." Pitt's organisational skills extend to her luggage. "I've become a packing ninja," she laughs. "I never truly unpack – key shoes and toiletries stay in the suitcase – and I map out five outfits on Sunday afternoon. I've got it down to a routine and never have

any wardrobe malfunctions!" However, it's not just outfit mishaps super-commuters ought to worry about, warns Dr Conrad Moreira, medical director of the Travel Doctor TMVC health clinics. Due to recycled air in the plane's cabin, health hazards for frequent flyers go beyond the usual coughs and colds. "Measles and chickenpox are also spread by breathing in germs, so think about getting vaccinations, along with the flu jab," he says. Commuters should also avoid flying with sinus problems, after surgeries and in late pregnancy. The lifestyle can also be a concern, says Dr Moreira. "Being a frequent business traveller can lead to unhealthy lifestyle habits – it's easy to eat and drink too much fatty, salty airline food and alcohol." Emotional stress can be just as taxing. "A lot of business people complain about isolation and loneliness," he explains. "Being away from home can place stress on your relationships, which can lead to feelings of guilt and depression. Try to place work in perspective: work to live, and not the other way round." That's a philosophy both Henderson and Pitt embrace wholeheartedly. "I have a life in two cities – an expanded life," enthuses Henderson, while Pitt agrees: "This is such a rich and varied life. My world has definitely widened."  FOLLOW HANNAH ON TWITTER @HFJAMES.

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