



Malta is home to a beguiling mix of cultures that have melded together over generations.

Easy Living in English-Speaking Expat Spots

“In My Humble Opinion Malta is Easily the Best Place to Live in Europe”

Name: Michael “LeMakoo” Wright
Age: 52
Living in: San Ġwann, Malta

Michael Wright is an artist. He once worked with large media organisations in his native Sydney and in London. He did everything from political cartoons to writing and editing. But when he moved to the island nation of Malta 12 years ago, he decided to pursue oil painting. It was something he had “always wanted to do”. “I still remember the first time I came here, I loved it immediately,” Michael says, citing Malta’s food, culture and lifestyle.

Michael found Malta to have a laidback vibe, similar to Australia, describing it as “like Sydney without waves”. He also noticed that it was easy to get by using only English, since both Maltese and English are official languages in the southern European country.

“I only speak English, with all the necessary ‘pleases and thank yous’ in Maltese,” he says. “There are some Maltese people that don’t speak English, but in my experience, this is very rare.” He

adds that most communication needed to fulfil public services is written in English.

Malta was a British colony for 150 years. This means that many documents are in English, including visa applications, internet contracts and most food products. It has been a member of the European Union since 2004.

Focused on reaching his creative goals, Michael founded LeMakoo Art soon after he arrived in Malta. (LeMakoo is Michael’s nickname.) It didn’t take him long to find inspiration in the country’s “fantastic” scenery.

“There’s so much of it to paint and it changes drastically with the seasons,” he says. “My favourite time to capture moody landscapes is winter, when the sea is rough and there are more clouds.”

Malta’s compact size means that Michael is never far from the destinations that he paints. His artwork often depicts the skyline of the capital city of Valletta, as well as the hilltop town of Mdina. He also paints Malta’s historic forts and coastal watchtowers constructed from the island’s golden limestone. These structures were built by the Knights of St. John, who ruled the island from 1530 to 1798.

Michael uses vibrant colours in his artwork, which has been purchased by art collectors worldwide. It is also appreciated by locals, who decorate the walls of their restaurants, wine bars and furniture showrooms with it.

Together with his partner, Jo, Michael recently built a home in San Ġwann, a town just a few kilometres from Valletta. Like so much of Malta, San Ġwann has layers of history. There are prehistoric cart ruts, centuries’-old chapels and the ruins of a tower believed to have Roman or Punic origins.

Steak and other meat are better priced in Malta than they are in Australia, says Michael. He recently bought steaks from a local butcher for \$7.83 apiece. As for housing expenses, Michael says that a couple could find a two-bedroom flat for \$783 to \$940, while groceries for two might cost \$313 to \$626 per month.

With a passion for his artwork and an abundance of Maltese subject matter to paint, Michael does not see retirement on the horizon any time soon.

“As an artist, I will never retire, but if you have the money to retire here and not work it’s a great place, especially if you like sunshine.”

Malta’s pleasant Mediterranean climate (average annual temperature 23 C), means that residents can lead an outdoor lifestyle for much of the year, full of barbecues and coastal living.

Some of his favourite swimming spots are located in the northern and western parts of the island, including Mellieħa Golden Bay and Paradise Bay. “I don’t swim in winter, but there are plenty of walks mainly in the valleys,” Michael says.

“In my humble opinion Malta is easily the best place to live in Europe.”—*Tricia A. Mitchell.*

“We Were Just Biding Our Time in Other Countries Until We Got Back to Penang”

Names: Gerry and Beth Steiert
Age: 58 and 55
Living in: Penang Island, Malaysia

In 2000, Gerry and Beth Steiert were planning to bring their three kids to live in Southeast Asia for a year-long sabbatical. The idea was to teach English in Thailand for six months, then travel through the region for the rest of the year.

But then Gerry got offered a teaching job based in Penang and the family jumped at the chance. “We were planning to go for a year then return to resume our lives. But, we all loved Penang so much we stayed for nine years and we never stopped working,” says Gerry.

Before the move to Penang, the Steierts had never been overseas. “We had no idea what to expect,” admits Beth, “but we all fell in love with the place.”

After Penang, they worked in schools in Chiang Mai and Bangkok, Thailand, for seven years, and Riyadh, Saudi Arabia for two. They never returned back home to live...it no longer felt like home. “I would never take away the travelling and moving that we did,” says Beth, “but really we were just biding our time in other countries until we got back to Penang. It’s very calming here and the perfect place for us.” The fact that English is the unofficial main language, makes the case for them returning to live in Penang even more compelling.

Since May of this year, the couple have been living in the Tanjung Bungah neighbourhood of Penang Island (read more about this and other Penang neighbourhoods on [page 16](#)), in a four-bedroom, five-bathroom house with a secured driveway, large enough for three cars. It’s a very peaceful setting, perfect for their morning ritual of coffee on their wrap-around balcony and watching the monkeys. “Every morning they run along the power cables. We call it the Cable Network; dozens of monkeys come down to play, eat and watch us watch them,” says Gerry.

They have a large garden which keeps them busy; full of chili plants that the local birds seem to enjoy, as well as a few coconut palms. The local bat makes its nightly fly-by skimming for insects and fat monitor lizards are no strangers to the neighbourhood.

It’s a large home, more than they need, but it’s perfect for entertaining and visitors. Their kids—now grown-up and living overseas—have already paid a visit. They have room for a small kiddie pool for their granddaughter when she comes to stay.

A home like theirs rents for \$987 a month, a fraction of what it would back home. “We would be lucky to have a few nice summer nights for a barbecue in our

previous life, but here in Penang, we get good weather 365 days a year,” says Gerry. “Every day we go for walks up the hill behind our home, go on scooter rides and garden. We have a much more outdoor lifestyle.”

Beth says, “We always wanted to be on a dragon boat team and now we’re on a team with people from 13 different countries. We practice twice a week and are in an International Dragon Boat regatta coming up in Kuching, on the island of Borneo.”

Moving away from family is never easy, but they use technology to keep in contact. “One of the hardest things about being here is how far away we are from the kids,” says Beth. “But we message them every day and get daily pictures of our granddaughter. Yes, it’s hard but it’s not impossible anymore—we Skype or FaceTime regularly. Distance isn’t an obstacle it’s just a challenge.”

“We could have moved anywhere in the world, but Penang feels like home,” says Gerry. Not everyone understands how or why they would live abroad. But it’s okay to live a life that other people don’t understand, or that they fear. So many people say things like “You’re so brave” or “We wish we could move abroad...but.” Gerry and Beth took the “but” out of that statement. It’s what they wanted and they made it happen. “We are children of the world,” says Gerry. And they love every minute of it.—*Kirsten Raccuia*.

“I Get to Meet Interesting People From All Over the World”

Name: Kenny Guinn

Age: 56

Living in: Ambergris Caye, Belize

Kenny Guinn came to live full-time on the tropical island of Ambergris Caye, Belize, five years ago. “I come from Texas. I worked in the printing and graphics industry for many years. But I’ve been coming to these parts since I was 18 and have been smitten with the area and people for many years now.”

In Belize, he found a place that was close enough to family and friendly enough to new business that he felt

able to make the move. Ambergris Caye is known for its laidback atmosphere. Its many expats love that they can go barefoot, listen to live music any night of the week, and enjoy some of the best fishing and boating opportunities in the world.

Because he wasn’t ready or able to retire when he made his move, Kenny had to be creative in finding a way to make a living, but also live his dream life. “Once I’d made it to Belize, my plan was to retire here, but my finances were such that that wasn’t an option. I decided to retool my research to look for business opportunities. My main reasons for focusing on Belize were that English is the main language spoken and there’s a similar system of law.”

Belize can work for many entrepreneurs, as there are still many niche and even basic services that are needed for its growing population of expats. And Kenny has found a way to provide both. After many months of research and planning and making offers on other operations in town, he landed a successful laundry business.

Although he jokes that his day job of running a laundry isn’t glamorous, it allows him a chance to do his first love—doing karaoke in the many beach bars in Ambergris Caye.

“This is by far my favourite part of living and working on the island. I get paid to hang out in bars and help people (tourists, locals, expats, everybody...) have fun and enjoy their night out.”

Kenny has settled in to the relaxed pace of island life. “The best part of operating a business in Belize, for me, is the freedom to make my own rules for my day-to-day business. While I want to maximize my production and income, if I need to take the afternoon off, I do.”

On the island, there is always something to celebrate—and Kenny gets to be a part of it, with VIP status, when he performs his karaoke gigs. “I get to meet some of the most interesting people from all over the world. We’ve done karaoke in German, Swedish, Finnish, Spanish, English and even Portuguese.”—*Laura Diffendal*. ■

“In Belize, I make my own rules for my day-to-day business.”