

Private Renting: London v The World

By

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Six tenants from different parts of the world share their views on how living and renting standards in London compare to those in their home countries

These are troubled times for tenants in London - money doesn't go a long way in the private rented sector anymore and landlords hold all the power - in an overcrowded market with a huge demand for properties.

But the paradox is that even with hiking prices of housing and under such squeezed conditions, many foreigners still view the UK's capital as "the" city to live in.

So is London better or worse than other countries around the world ?

The Australian Tenant

24-year-old Emma Austen from Brisbane moved to London at the end of 2010 to experience European culture. Since then she has been renting rooms in shared accommodation in Clapham Common as well as Highbury and Islington. Looking back at her expectations of London, she reflects: "All I knew about London's living situation was the generalised talk that London was an expensive city and living costs were high. I knew that I would have to spend more in a bigger city than I did at home."

Even though Austen feels lucky to have had great housemates, she reveals that she was let down by estate agents when trying to rent a property in Islington. "The property wasn't ready when we were supposed to move in and there was a lot of stuffing around by the rental agency," she says. "When we were negotiating the lease there were promises made that still haven't happened five months into living there."

Austen also experienced it first hand how difficult it is to even be considered for any property in London. She admits: "I noticed that when looking for a room to rent the 'interview' process is much more gruelling in London. There are so many more people interested in the same room that it becomes quite intense," she says. "Sometimes you meet the housemates while other potential 'bidders' are there at the same time."

Summing up the current renting situation in the UK's capital, Austen says: "Your money doesn't go far when renting in London." She then explains how different it is in her homeland. "Honestly going to Australia you will feel spoilt for space," she says, "your money will go a long way and everything will seem wide, spacious and open."

In her opinion even lettings agents are better organised in Australia. She clarifies: "You will find the quality of leasing agent much more specialised and knowledgeable. In London you are just another client and dispensable. There are hundreds more people 'bidding' for the same place, so you aren't overly important to them."

The Brazilian Tenant

Sonia Flood, 44, has rented in various parts of London including Elephant and Castle, Dollis Hill and even Vauxhall and experienced good and bad times while living in rented accommodation. She says: "London might not be very cheap, but you can still find reasonable renting, like sharing a flat or even a room."

Flood who worked as an executive in Brazil came to London to go back to being a student, so naturally she didn't have very high expectations to begin with. She claims that people need to have an open mind when moving overseas. "I think people get shocked, because they expect too much or they expect something that is not real," she says. While there are

many differences between the standards of flats in Brazil and in London in terms of furnishings and size, one of the things that Flood has been longing for in London's rented properties is a utility room.

She admits: "The thing that I miss here is the area where you put the clothes to dry. This is something that has no space in London." Flood explains that Brazilians are quite clean when it comes to keeping their residences tidy. They either do their cleaning themselves or hire a maid. According to her, standards for cleanliness are completely different in London. She says: "Generally speaking Brazilians are fussier in keeping things clean and tidy. But London is a cosmopolitan place where people are just for a little while," she says, "so that's why a lot of people don't bother."

The Chinese Tenant

Yong Cheng is a 33-year old who now lives in a house share in Chiswick, but previously also rented in Ealing and Acton. Yong moved to London in 2005 to look for a job after he experienced a life as a student tenant in Brighton. He was aware that moving to London would mean more money out of his pocket. Yong says: "I knew it was going to be more expensive than Brighton."

Although Yong claims that the living conditions in Chiswick are good, not all his renting experience is this positive. He looks back: "We rented a room from a landlord and he just grabbed our deposit and ran away. That was kind of a bad experience." When Yong and his roommates lost their deposit, they were thinking about taking some action against the runaway landlord. "The case was very complicated. There were like five of us," he says, "we discussed some solutions maybe to try to sue him, but it turned out it was going to be expensive to bring the case to court."

According to Yong, most rented accommodation in China comes cheaper and furnished. Comparing renting standards in London with big cities in China, Yong reveals: "Living conditions are better here. It is more hygienic and there is less pollution and things appear tidier and more organised over here."

The South African Tenant

Francine Willemse, 40, who moved to London seven years ago, says: "Coming from South Africa I knew that the houses will be much smaller than back home and also more expensive." As a private tenant in Muswell Hill she didn't experience any problems with her rented apartment and in fact became very good friends with the landlord.

When asked about main differences in rented properties, Willemse explains what the basic renting standards are in South Africa. "Houses back home are normally not furnished and they are much bigger in comparison to what you get in London," she says, "houses in South Africa normally have a garden of substantial size."

According to Willemse when cleanliness of flats and houses is taken into consideration London would lose big time. She says: "In South Africa the general practice is to hire a cleaner and therefore the houses or flats are much cleaner than in this country where the norm is for people to clean their own place."

In a price contest London wouldn't score very well either. She adds: "Comparing prices - houses and flats and surrounding ground are much more expensive in London than back in South Africa."

The Indian Tenant

Chetan Mehta, 35, swapped his family house in the town of Bombay for a rented flat in Swiss Cottage only six months ago. Before he moved to London he received advice from a friend who already lived here. Mehta reflects: "I was told that there is a lot of variation in terms of the rental market here and depending on the place the rents will fluctuate."

Except for a rough start as a tenant when he faced a problem with a lettings agency, he has not had any renting headaches. When comparing living habits in India to those in London the biggest difference that Mehta sees is the interaction between people. He says: "In India there would be a lot of interaction with the neighbours. It's more social, people are friendlier, and they interact a lot." He continues: "Your neighbour kind of becomes a part of your family. All that doesn't happen here."

On renting similarities and differences between London and his hometown, Mehta admits that rents in Bombay are pretty steep, too, but at the same time says that although London has strict inventory checks when tenants first move in, he has never heard of these in India.

Mehta explains that India's rented property market doesn't offer many houses as such. Apparently it's all about blocks of flats there. When comparing the size of rented properties between London and India, he swiftly adds: "I guess the size of the property would be the same. Bombay is also too populated and there is a lack of space."

The Russian Tenant

Julia Koroleva has been living in central London for five years mostly in flatshares. The 25-year-old Russian says: "When coming here I simply had no expectations." She continues: "But having said that, I did have an idea of what London life was like based on Love Actually, Notting Hill and similar silly movies that I love."

As a private tenant in London, Koroleva has seen all sorts of things. "One bad experience I had was when my landlord couldn't find tenants and just had one option - a student from Herefordshire - a very cute and innocent looking boy who turned out to be a drug addict and a complete mess. My other flatmate Cathy and I moved out eventually and the landlord had to evict the unwanted tenant."

Bad housemate was, however, not the only problem Koroleva had to face when renting in London. Her apartment in St James's Park was beautifully furnished but had major shortcomings. She says: "We had heating and hot water problems so often, that it started driving me crazy. The good side of it was that I had to join the local LA Fitness in case I unexpectedly couldn't take a shower in the morning."

But as Koroleva claims, it hasn't been all just bad. "I met many lovely people while flatsharing," she says. Aside from nightmare renting stories and a lot of moving around, she feels that London is better than Russia. She admits: "Overall the standard of living on average is higher in London than in Russia, but lower than in southern parts of Europe where space is not that precious."