

Will it be Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the United States or maybe Britain?

Earning a living Down Under

Skilled South Africans are being transferred or head-hunted, writes **Linda Vergnani**

TURN on the radio in Australia and you will hear the distinctive Afrikaans accent of Marius Kloppers who, as CEO of BHP Billiton, is spearheading the A\$147-billion takeover bid of BHP Billiton.

Kloppers is one of the SA corporate superstars who have lit up the Australian and international business firmament. Among the brightest is Gail Kelly, the new CEO of Westpac. Her earnings could top A\$12-million per year, making her the most highly paid businesswoman in Australia.

Kelly, who emigrated to the country with her family in 1997, is listed among the 50 most powerful women in global business by Fortune magazine.

Other leading business migrants include Giam Swiegers, CEO of Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu in Australia, and Jonathan Pinshaw, chairman of The Just Group.

Australia's Department of Immigration and Citizenship lists South Africa as one of the top 10 countries when it comes to gaining citizenship in terms of Australia's business-skills migration programme. According to the department, 3 996 South Africans settled permanently in Australia in the past two years.

In addition, there were more than 7 900 South Africans in Australia on temporary 457 business visas by June 2007.

Although the average weekly earning in Australia were A\$1 162 in 2007, starting over can be tough for business migrants. The cost of

living in major cities such as Sydney can be exceptionally high and the mortgage on a modest house can easily exceed A\$1 000 a week.

Craig Badings, director and head of corporate public relations at Savage & Partners, moved to Australia in 2003 with his teacher wife and two young children. He says unless South Africans are transferred to Australia or head-hunted, they have to be prepared to "take a few backward steps" in their career and salary.

Badings, who founded Rainmaker Public Relations and was previously MD of Cape Town Citigate, initially took a role as account director in a public relations firm in Melbourne.

"You come here with all this experience but none of the Australian market, and you have to reinvent yourself," he said. Badings likens it to a "mental enema", which forces migrants to refocus their skills.

Now based in Sydney, which he loves, Badings says: "You've got to embrace Australian ways because South Africans are generally perceived as quite aggressive and arrogant."

Badings says South Africans who pick up the "nuances around the boardroom table" and adapt to

Australians' polite, consensus approach to business will get ahead quicker.

Evan Petrelis, who was the 2007 New South Wales president of the Australia Africa Business Council, remarks that the integration of highly educated South African immigrants into the Australian workplace is on the whole excellent.

"While the 'direct' or sometimes even confrontational approach of some South Africans on occasion lands them in hot water, South Africans are generally respected and well regarded in the Australian business community as astute, entrepreneurial and hard-working," he said.

Expatriate South Africans have "typically thrived in professional sectors, particularly accounting, law and finance", and there are also a number of high-profile former South Africans leading blue-chip retail organisations.

Petrelis, who moved from London to Australia three years ago, notes that while most expatriate South Africans initially find jobs with organisations, many "move on to take advantage of Australia's favourable business start-up incentives and go on to establish successful small businesses in a number of fields".



NEW FRONTIERS: South Africans Greg Haskins and Lindsay Brotherton and Zimbabwean Rufaro Maunze at home in their new home — Australia

'South Africans are generally respected and well regarded in the Australian business community as astute, entrepreneurial and hard-working'

Thriving in Australia does not come easy

LINDA VERGNANI

Buffeting across the jade waters of Sydney harbour in his Bayliner boat with his South African “mates”, or gazing out of his office window at the golden observation decks of the Sydney Tower, Greg Haskins knows he is living the dream.

As director of recruitment company My Departure Lounge, this urbane 28-year-old former Durban chartered accountant sells the Australian dream to other South Africans. The firm, established in mid-2007, recruits South African chartered accountants for investment banks, multinational companies and other blue-chip clients in Australia.

He admitted that he gets “lots of flack” for recruiting South Africans to Australia. Haskins’s response is that with globalisation, chartered accountants can work in multiple countries. “With a chartered accountancy qualification, the world is your oyster, especially if you come out of the auditing environment.”

It was easy for Haskins to move to Australia. In 2004, Deloitte Australia called “out of the blue” and asked him to assist with a major auditing contract. He flew into Sydney for a four-month contract, which turned into a permanent job.

“It was a pull factor. I was doing the ‘must see the world, working in different cities’ thing. Having tried it out and seeing what Sydney had to offer, I

lot faster in Australia than in South Africa,” Haskins said.

He and Australian colleague Tammy Frame realised there was a general shortage of chartered accountants for companies in Australia and decided to open their own specialist recruiting firm. Frame, previously an audit director with Deloitte, said South African chartered accountants are highly sought after in Australia. She has found them very entrepreneurial, straight talking, continuously pushing for improvement and “very have fun”, which gels with Australians.

Haskins works up to 11 hours some days. “I’m working a little

As a black person from Zimbabwe, people would ask where she learned such good English

longer than I should, but I’m still having fun doing it.”

He rents a flat in the swish 43-storey Horizon building, designed by iconic architect Harry Seidler. The curvilinear building, known as a party block, is within walking distance of his rented office. After work he meets friends at trendy bars, with a favourite, the Opera Bar, on the quay overlooking Sydney Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

He has no immediate plans to return to South Africa. “You feel proud to be South African, but

Zimbabwean Rufaro Maunze has had a meteoric rise to become a director of technical and training for a global accounting firm. She said she enjoys the security of living in Sydney, where she rents an apartment in the posh waterside suburb of Wollstonecraft. She can walk home alone from the bus stop at 3am without fearing attack.

What she found a struggle is Sydney’s racial mix, which she estimates features only 1% black Africans. People were curious about her and would sometimes ask where she learned to speak such good English.

Maunze said she found Johannesburg faster paced than Sydney and more stylish, and would eventually like to move there, mainly because she would be closer to her family in Harare.

Lindsay Brotherton, senior manager: group financial control for Westpac, constantly debates returning to South Africa, though she said it never seemed to be the right time. Brotherton said there were a variety of business opportunities in Australia, but described her first 18 months in Sydney in a global accounting firm as really tough.

“You spend a lot of time proving yourself. It took me 18 months to be promoted, whereas I would have been promoted automatically in South Africa.”

Since moving to Westpac, she feels a “lot more settled” and enjoys her work.