
THE TIMES

SE News
HD **Exodus of star names takes the sparkle out of Sydney**
BY Lagan Sydney
WC 503 words
PD 14 September 2015
SN The Times
SC T
ED 1; Scotland
PG 35
LA English
CY © Times Newspapers Limited 2015
LP

With its beaches, harbour and globally recognised landmarks, Sydney is regarded as the jewel in Australia's crown — but its own gems are leaving.

The sudden departures of the city's biggest and wealthiest names in film, stage and business have left the city's social chroniclers worried, and celebrity agents casting offshore for business. Cate Blanchett, the Oscar-winning actress, and her husband Andrew Upton, director of the Sydney Theatre Company — Sydney's showbiz royal couple — are the latest in a string of celebrities to announce their departure to Los Angeles.

TD

They are following Baz Luhrmann, Australia's best-known film director and producer, whose most recent film was *The Great Gatsby*. Mr Luhrmann and his wife, Catherine Martin, the Oscar-winning costume and production designer, have recently relocated from inner Sydney to New York.

Also leaving is James Packer, the international casino mogul, scion of the once all-powerful Packer family who long dominated Australia's media landscape. Mr Packer has relocated to Israel, where he has bought a mansion 45 minutes' drive from Tel Aviv. It is next door to the private home, but not the official residence, of his friend Binyamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister. Mr Packer recently embarked on a relationship with Mariah Carey, the American singer. His former wife and children have moved from Sydney to Los Angeles.

Even Ian Thorpe, the swimmer and Australia's most internationally renowned sportsman of recent years, whose five Olympic gold medals are the most won by an Australian, has left Sydney and established a base in Switzerland. The move comes after Mr Thorpe's revelation a year ago in an interview with Sir Michael Parkinson that he was gay.

"I think the weather's been cold, but they'll be back," said Max Markson, Australia's best-known celebrity agent, a little wistfully.

Andrew Hornery, who has chronicled the city's social and cultural scene for two decades for *The Sydney Morning Herald*, believes the exodus is changing the city's social order. "Maybe its time to recalibrate the social radar in Sydney," he said.

The departures have led to a flood of expensive homes coming on to the Sydney market. Last month's sale of Mr Packer's recently completed six-storey mansion on Sydney Harbour for A\$70 million (£32 million), to Dr Chau Chak Wing, a little-known Chinese-Australian businessman, shattered Australian houseprice records. Mr Hornery added: "There's been a real influx of wealthy Chinese people, but we don't know who they are ... They don't have the same sort of cachet, I guess, of a Cate Blanchett or James Packer."

However, Mr Markson, an Englishman who has worked in Sydney for three decades, said: "Those that have left can easily afford to drop back in. The magic of Sydney is that it's so far away. It's an effort to get here, but when you do, people love it."

NS gmovie : Movies | gcat : Political/General News | gent : Arts/Entertainment

RE austr : Australia | israel : Israel | lax : Los Angeles | sydney : Sydney | apacz : Asia Pacific | asiaz : Asia | ausnz : Australia/Oceania | meastz : Middle East | medz : Mediterranean | namz : North America | nswals : New South Wales | usa : United States | usca : California | usw : Western U.S. | wasiaz : Western Asia

PUB News UK & Ireland Limited

AN Document T000000020150914eb9e000ly