

## Depression or Disappearance Dead or Alive

I have to admit to suffering from depression for much of the time these days – just as I was for a few years up to early 1997 when I left this country to change my life. In those days, much of my depression was caused by the effects of my deciding to part company with my then girlfriend, which, on reflection, was one of the most sensible things I've done in life. However, it was certainly a tough call to make and resulted in some seriously tough times on an emotional level. It made me change my life forever and once I'd disappeared from England and touched down in the land of sunshine, I came back to life again.

The cause now is rather different – although the solution is quite similar as both involved me getting out of the UK. The cause now is having to live in the UK with its dreadful climate, overcrowding and cost of living as well as a number of other factors, including boredom which has been exacerbated by being forced to retire as well as the Covid lock-down – but mainly the climate. It should be remembered that humans are tropical animals, totally unsuited to North European climates. No doubt the Romans were only too delighted to leave Britain after their adventures here about two millennia ago. No wonder they invented central heating! (we never turn our central heating off – ever). At least the Mediterranean climate is bearable<sup>1</sup>.

As I stated above, the climate has a huge effect on me. When the weather is warm and the sun shining, I feel alive. For most of the year in the UK I feel more dead than alive. Whenever we go to a place in the sun, I come alive. I have more energy and a greater will to live. The UK must be one of the most depressing places in which to live on the planet. Get me out of here!

When I mention departing from this green and unpleasant land to other people, they sometimes ask me where I'd like to live and I've now got the answer sorted out. I'd like to live almost anywhere where it is safe, warm and affordable. That covers a fair amount of the globe. I'd also throw into the mix a place where the population density is less than one third that of England (which is 432 people per square kilometre – the UK as a whole being 279 people per square kilometre). I'd have to exclude a number of third-world countries too as I do require access to good services and facilities, such as good healthcare, internet and communication infrastructure. Sadly, even though I've spent more than six years in the Philippines this is definitely one country that is excluded from my 'go-to' list even though the climate suits me very well. Apart from many other factors, it has a population density of 372 people per square kilometre which doesn't help. In reality, this figure will be a little higher because more than 5600 of the 7641 islands that make up the surface area of this country are uninhabited.

One of the most, if not the most, civilised countries in the world is Switzerland; which is why so many of the rich and famous go there to live – apart from the tax benefits. Sadly, although I dearly love Switzerland – it's my favourite country to visit - it is not at all affordable for someone such as myself. I'm not by any stretch of the imagination a millionaire, neither am I likely to become one. I have to say that it doesn't meet my other criteria too. It's not warm

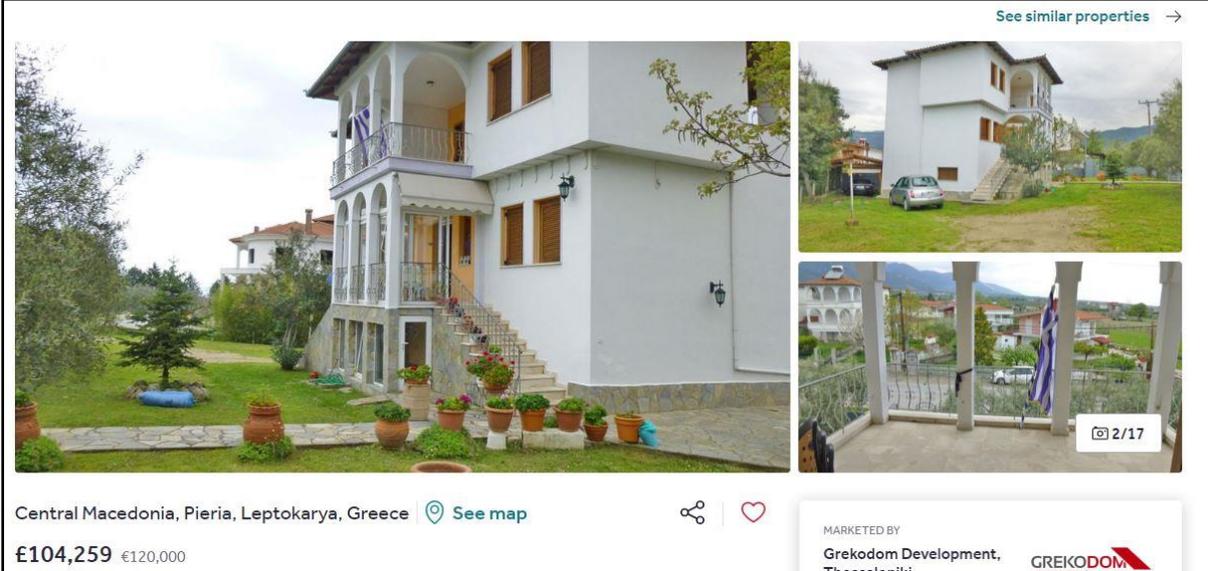
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<sup>1</sup> Refer to URL:

[https://www.coolantarctica.com/Antarctica%20fact%20file/science/cold\\_humans.php#:~:text=Humans%20are%20essentially%20tropical%20animals,appropriate%20clothing%20and%20building%20shelters](https://www.coolantarctica.com/Antarctica%20fact%20file/science/cold_humans.php#:~:text=Humans%20are%20essentially%20tropical%20animals,appropriate%20clothing%20and%20building%20shelters)

throughout the whole year and the population density is 220 people per square kilometre, although I could be somewhat flexible about this if the other factors were met – after all it's about half that of England. Of course, if I was sufficiently wealthy, I could buy a home in Switzerland for the best weather period and another home somewhere sunny for the times when the weather in Switzerland became unfriendly, but I haven't won the lottery yet.

Of course, there are many places that are much cheaper to live in and buy a home in than Switzerland. Many areas of France, Italy and Greece hold promise - such as this beautiful home near the coast and mountains of Eastern Greece:



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When I talk about getting out of the UK, which I certainly hope I'll be able to do in the not too distant future, people often say to me that they couldn't do that even if they wanted to. The reason for this is their attachment to family and friends. How sad is that? Of course, many people do have serious responsibilities to their family especially if they are caring for them in old age and this must be accepted and supported. In fact, it's a great shame that more families don't look after their old folk and just dump them in nursing homes to die. Outside that responsibility, I would never allow other people (apart from Grace, of course, as we do things together) to influence, let alone decide what I want to do in life. Thankfully, I now don't have any strong ties to family or friends that would make me consider not leaving the UK permanently. If family and friends want to visit me whilst I'm living in another country I'd be pleased to accommodate them, but they wouldn't change my mind about getting out of here - as my (late) mother found out when I first left the UK early in 1997, a few months after the death of my father. Even then, when she was fully independent, I made sure she was being cared for and we were all with her during the last days of her life some years later.

I've always been a very independent person and more than capable of living on my own if necessary. For example, early in 1997 I left the UK to go to the Philippines. I had no job to go to and no idea what the future held for me. I only knew one person there, who was of considerable assistance to me, but I'd have left the UK anyway regardless of that. In fact, I was considering not going to the Philippines but heading for Thailand and other SE Asian countries instead, where I knew no one at all. I even had a visa for Thailand as well as the Philippines so I could have gone either way. These things just don't bother me at all – life is

just one big adventure – albeit a short one. Wouldn't it be great if we could enjoy much longer lives and good health in which to have adventures?

I love keeping on the move. During the first eight years that Grace and I were married, we had fifteen homes in four countries. Great! Since then we've added several more homes and one other country to that list. Unfortunately, we've been in the UK now for a several years and it's driving me into depression. This has been exacerbated by being forced into retirement just over two years ago and having to live a country that has been locked-down for much of that time because of the Covid pandemic – and there seems little sign that this will end any time soon. There is sure to be a great deal of discrimination against anyone who has chosen not to be vaccinated and they may even be prevented from travelling outside their own country.

I am amazed that people are still buying holiday homes in other countries during these days of so much uncertainty. Do they know something that I don't? Or are they just wildly optimistic? Grace and I have talked about doing such a thing ourselves, but not during a pandemic when the rules change from one day to the next. In fact, we came quite close to doing so not much more than two years ago – isn't it a good job that we didn't? And anything could happen during the next few years.

I've often entertained the thought of just disappearing. Of course, to achieve that totally, and legally, is almost impossible these days where you're constantly under surveillance by the authorities. Even more difficult in these days of Covid. Changing your identity and name is a bit over the top for what I'm thinking of and is fraught with difficulties – and it is usually only criminals who need to go that far, not law-abiding citizens. Of course, in this situation you are unlikely to be buying a home somewhere and even renting a home would raise your profile somewhat. However, if you don't mind being of no fixed abode there are other options.

It should be possible to maintain a very low profile by just going away and keeping on the move. The downside is that to do this requires one to not use a motorised vehicle as the legalities of running one are always immediately traceable – and require you to maintain requirements such as an MOT test certificate, insurance and road tax as well as the expense of fuel – and registration numbers are easily spotted and recorded by the millions of cameras in use by the police. You also need an address which has to be arranged somehow. You can't write 'No fixed abode' on legal documents! Fortunately, there is an alternative which is also a whole lot cheaper to buy and run.

I've stated many times that the best way to see a country is by riding a bicycle and this would help you maintain a very low profile too. Of course, many, mainly younger people, do spend a lot of time away on their travels but it's not ideal for us folks who are getting on a bit in years, especially as one is so limited as to what can be carried on board in terms of living space and comfort. Sadly, I know only too well that Grace would draw the line at accompanying me on her bicycle - although I'm still working on the idea for her to come with me! Grace has been incredibly loyal to me during the last twenty years but living outdoors for months or years at a time is rather tough going for anyone; after all, the sun doesn't shine all the time even in the best of climates. I'd have more chance of persuading her to travel with me if we had an old Ford Transit van!

Being an animal lover, the idea of mimicking Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes by Robert Louis Stevenson has a certain appeal but the practicalities are somewhat daunting – and remember that Stevenson was only travelling for twelve days – not exactly a long time.

Living on an island is another challenge as buying a ferry ticket immediately tells the spies that you've left the country and this is made even more difficult during Covid pandemic times. Once you're over the water, things become rather more difficult for them to find you as most borders are now open, especially those located in fairly remote areas.

Leaving the UK with a new passport gives you ten years of travelling possibilities as long as you follow the 90-day in any 180-day rolling period limitation for staying in the Schengen area, and some other countries, so trips need better planning now we're out of the EU than they did previously. Read URL: [http://drivethrutours.com/Getting\\_Out.pdf](http://drivethrutours.com/Getting_Out.pdf) and keep evidence of where you've been with dates!

Another way of travelling without killing yourself riding your bicycle for long distances is to take your bicycle with you on the train or bus. This is particularly the case when wanting to travel long distances in a short time when compared to riding your bicycle. Remember too that train fares in most other countries are nowhere near as expensive as they are in rip-off Britain. You may find a Eurail pass to be a good investment but only if you're using the train a great deal as even these aren't cheap – and your details will be recorded – refer to URL: <https://www.eurail.com/en/eurail-passes>. Sleeping during overnight train journeys saves accommodation costs and keeps you in the warm and dry too – although if you want a sleeper berth you'll have to pay extra.

Obtaining money can also be a problem as every transaction is traceable so it's not a good idea to use your plastic card in the stores where you buy stuff from – better to pay with cash. This is where trains can be useful. You can disguise your whereabouts by drawing cash at an ATM in a country where you're not staying, then catch the train to a destination country some miles away – and never use the same ATM more than once. The borders of Switzerland, France and Italy are particularly close to each other as are Switzerland, Austria and Germany – and not too far from Lichtenstein as an additional option.

Switzerland is a good country for getting your cash and getting out again as it is a small country that has borders with five other countries (Italy, France, Germany, Austria and the Principality of Liechtenstein). Other countries, such as France and Germany, may have more international borders but they are much larger and may need more travelling distance to get in and out unless you happen to be staying close to a border. Carrying large amounts of cash is not a great idea though – especially if you're alone and travelling on a bicycle.

Another factor one has to consider is where you're going to stay at night. Even if you carry your own tent, which I highly recommend, camping wild is illegal in many countries. Further details can be found at URL: <https://momgoescamping.com/wild-camping-laws-europe/> Of course, you can often get away with wild camping if you're discreet and don't pitch your tent until dark in an out of the way place and move on at dawn. Or ask a farmer if you can pitch on one of his fields as a legal way of discreet camping. Keeping clean and dealing with waste is another problem that is not for the faint-hearted.

Staying in hotels and hostels is not advisable as they record your details and passport number, as do some campsites these days. It just depends how 'invisible' you want to be. If no one is

actually looking for you it shouldn't be a problem anyway unless you get into trouble. One of my former shipmates was telling me that his mother used to disappear for weeks or even months at a time, then reappear as though nothing unusual had happened. It must have been somewhat disconcerting not knowing when your mum was next going to disappear and reappear though.

Another major factor against disappearing is getting rid of your possessions if you're going to attempt being homeless and of no fixed abode. Are you going to give them away, sell them or dump them? I will add a cautionary note here: Don't ask your friends or family to store items for you. It just doesn't work, as we discovered the hard way. The longer you're away the more likelihood there is of items going missing or getting damaged and relationships may suffer or fail as a result. It's also a lot to ask of these folks as it can be a considerable responsibility for them as well as taking up space in their home which they would like to use for themselves and, as we found out, there are some people who don't hesitate to get rid of your things once they get fed-up of storing them for you – and don't even tell you in advance!

The best option is to rent a storage unit, which we did for about eleven years whilst we were abroad and / or homeless. This is a great way to deal with those precious items but it is fairly expensive. Will the cost of storage cost more than replacing the items you store? If there are items that are particularly precious to you or of sentimental value you may well consider the cost worthwhile, but if the items don't have any significant value get rid of them. A company we can highly recommend that stored our things for all those eleven years was Reddaways<sup>2</sup> in Okehampton, Devon - who also delivered them to our home hundreds of miles away once we had somewhere permanent to live in the UK.

Being someone who is by nature a collector, getting rid of those precious items is very hard for me - hence the attraction of using a storage unit. However, I do recognise that getting rid of most of your possessions is a great feeling as it gives you more freedom. You aren't tied to any particular location. You can just get up and go to wherever takes your fancy.

So what of our future? In these days of the Great Reset and pandemics it is impossible to forecast what will happen in the short term, let alone for the long term. The world is in chaos and there is no stability for anyone to even think of making plans that might help us live a life in the sun.

Is it any wonder I'm depressed? I really hope we can go to live in the sunshine or even disappear in the not too distant future.

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to URL: <https://reddawaysremovals.co.uk/>