

Should you stay or should you go?

You're so close to achieving Permanent Residency, but another opportunity beckons. Is it worth the wait? asks *Kate Farr*.



Although many expats originally land in Hong Kong on a short-term posting, it's extremely common to meet people who have made the city their permanent base. Permanent Resident (PR) status can be an incentive for long-term Hong Kong expats, conferring as it does a number of rights and privileges excluded to those on standard Work or Dependent Visas.

Of course, the expat life can be a nomadic and unpredictable one, with companies often recalling employees at short notice, and unexpected job opportunities coming from out of the blue; however, if you are currently weighing up the pros and cons of a new move versus holding out for PR, here's what you need to know.

What's the benefit?

Once you become a PR, you attain "Right of Abode" in Hong Kong, meaning that you no longer need a visa to work or study in the SAR. This also entitles you to all residents' benefits, such as access to social housing and medical subsidies, eligibility for occasional government schemes (like the \$6,000 made available to all PRs back in 2011), plus the right to vote in Legislative Council and Chief

Executive elections.

Unlike many other countries, Hong Kong PR has few strings attached and does not require you to renounce any existing citizenships or passports upon qualification. Children below the age of 21 will be granted PR when one of their parents attains it, and, unlike our regional neighbour Singapore, this comes without the obligation of military service.

If you are considering buying property in Hong Kong, then you should be aware that non-PRs are liable for Buyer's Stamp Duty, currently set at 15 per cent of the purchase price.

Less tangibly, many people feel that PR status gives them more of a connection to Hong Kong society. In the words of recent PRs John and Victoria, "Hong Kong is generally pretty easy to [grant] a work permit; however PR has that allure of being something a bit more special, like attaining premium airline membership or a matte black credit card. In other countries, this can take as little as two years, with citizenship around the corner; having hit seven years, it felt like we had earned the right to be here."

Do you qualify?

However, before deciding to stay on, it's

worth ensuring that you actually qualify. Despite what many people believe, PR is not granted automatically at the seven-year mark, and you will need to prove to the Immigration Department that you have lived in Hong Kong for seven consecutive years on a valid Work, Student or Dependent Visa. Tourist Visas are not eligible towards a PR application, so check old passports for visa validity, and ensure the dates add up.

John and Victoria recommend planning ahead. "Think about PR even if you are years away, as you don't want a silly little mistake to reset the seven-year rule."

Once PR is granted, you need only return to Hong Kong once every 36 months to maintain your status, so you can then leave to work elsewhere, returning every three years with minimum fuss.

Of course, the decision to stay or go will most likely depend on how good the offer is elsewhere. If you don't see yourself remaining in Hong Kong long-term and you receive a competitive job offer, then you may err towards leaving. However, if you think that your family may benefit from a future in the Fragrant Harbour, an extra year or two now may make that a whole lot easier later. 📍