

Work from Anywhere

White sand, coffee in hand; is this the future of work in the Illawarra?

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In a new future of work, the Illawarra could become the hub for remote workers. With 65% of Illawarra workers able to work remotely, the Illawarra Region has the potential to be dubbed as the Work from Anywhere region! Not only do we have 35 white-sand beaches, we also have the key ingredients for success – high-speed and quality NBN connectivity and systems-rich innovative organisations. Place is critically important and the Illawarra’s proximity to nearby capital cities enables working from Anywhere, but is far enough away to have superb liveability and affordability.

In our COVID-19 disrupted world of work, we have learnt to work, socialise and shop in a different way and the work-scape has seen the biggest changes to date. We now can literally work from anywhere...so why not promote the Illawarra as Anywhere?

advancements in workplace efficiency which is allowing people to work from Anywhere. However, place is still highly important. Despite 67% of people expecting to work from home more post pandemic, the majority will try to remain close to the urban fringe whilst still being close to the physical workplace.

“ Do you fancy a bit of sunshine...with 33 white-sand beaches, why not work in the Caribbean? ”

But we are not alone, and certainly not the only place to promote working from anywhere. Anguilla in the Caribbean is promoting their small idyllic island as a place to work from anywhere.

Unfortunately, with international borders still closed, we are not able to venture off into the horizon and are called to look locally and notice the beauty that is sitting at our very door-step – the Illawarra.

Place does not mean what it used to mean. Gone are the days where you would move one block away from where your work was located. Now, the work follows you! The idea of place has drastically changed even further since COVID-19, alongside technological

The Illawarra is a fantastic place to both live and work. With 35 white sand beaches, an hour drive from Sydney, and a centre for food and leisure activities, the Illawarra has attracted an immense number of remote workers during COVID-19. The Illawarra’s proximity is a key asset, half-way between Sydney and Canberra; we live nearby, but just far enough away. That’s why the Illawarra is standing at the forefront of being the Anywhere place to work.

Liveability has been a central tenet of planning regimes for the past two decades. Place and liveability are critical to success. If that’s the case, what has remote working done to liveability? Will capital cities be decimated by the working from home revolution? Will the

resurgence of suburbia change the shape of where we work? Is local the new lovely? Can I live Anywhere and work remotely forever?

According to Bernard Salt, "In this bold new world the suburbs cast aside their pre-Corona personas and create localised communities pivoting to work-near-home collaboration spaces and education and civic facilities. The urban fabric loses its fried-egg logic and scrambles into a patchwork of self-contained but interconnected communities. Bike paths, walking trails, local networks radiating from — wait for it — non-CBD hubs reorganise the logic of Australian suburbia."

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Businesses and municipal leaders alike need to not assume that people should — or will want to — work 'Anywhere' post-COVID-19. Location still matters, especially to create, and benefit from an ecosystem of innovation.

To work from anywhere we need several key ingredients, over and above the most beaches. First and foremost, technology is King (or Queen). We must be supported with not only robust organisational systems but also with stable, secure and fast NBN connections, ideally through fibre to the premise. The 2020 federal government budget commitment to more fibre was great news for the Illawarra.

Secondly, organisations need operating models that are anchored in trust and outcomes. The old paradigm of 'face time culture' is out as we no longer need to see you in the office to know that you are working. The new COVID-19 remote working experiment is our current life. Organisations built on trust-based relationships will flourish in our working from anywhere uprising. Those leaders who enable us to perform based on outcomes and trust will thrive.

The 'face time culture' can develop into different interactions between workers. Team meetings can occur in external environments such as cafes, which is critical to boosting the local economies post pandemic. The Illawarra is prime for local food and coffee where workers can stay for a quick meeting, for a few hours or invest in a long-lunch.

This also sees the Illawarra in the sweet spot for working from Anywhere. With nearly 20,000 innovative Illawarra businesses, a strong innovation eco-system, anchored with iAccelerate at the Innovation Campus in Wollongong - the City of Innovation. Our award-winning University of Wollongong produces job-ready graduates who provide a rich source of fresh talent to Illawarra companies, as well as a critical investment attraction catalyst.

Not only do we have the right stuff when it comes to innovation, technology and proximity, we also have the right stuff when it comes to

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places to live. During COVID, the region's residential real estate enquiries have doubled, especially in the northern suburbs. According to a recent CoreLogic report, the Illawarra's residential real estate market has performed strongly, with the largest rise in housing values as well as the biggest jump in home sales over the past 12 months.

Time will tell whether we continue to see an increase in remote working from Anywhere in the Illawarra region. However, the author can report that this article was written at her local beach, North Wollongong, on a perfect blue-sky day, while overlooking the white-sand beach in Anywhere region.

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