

Semigration: What's all the hype about?

By [Grant Smee](#)

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The last decade has seen a massive uptick in South Africans choosing to emigrate and semigrate. While much has been written about the former, less is known about the trend of semigration and the motivations behind it.



Image source: [Gallo/Getty](#)

What is semigration and what's driving it?

Semigration or semi-emigration is the act of moving to another location within your home country. While this definition may prompt one to ask: "Isn't that just known as moving?" – semigration is distinguished by the motivating factors behind the relocation. Just like those who emigrate, they hope that a change of location will be the key to a better life, however, unlike emigrants they feel that a better life is still possible within South Africa.

Those who chose to semigrate are moving in search of a better quality of life, away from the dangers and stresses of the concrete jungle. It is, therefore, no surprise that Gauteng and specifically Johannesburg and surrounds have been worst affected by the semigration trend.

Concerns about the long-term physical and psychological effects of the stresses of urban living have been compounded by an increase in incidents of crime within the city. With this in mind, it is ironic that Cape Town, named the most crime-ridden region of the country by the SAPS, is such a popular destination for semigrants.

My experience as a property investor have allowed me to view semigration as not just a personal decision, but as a savvy investment opportunity too. The Cape Town property market is currently overcrowded and vulnerable to spikes in crime. However, I'd highlight the smaller towns along the Western Cape coast to any prospective semigrants, as they are able to offer both the quality of life these semigrants seek and the promise of a profitable property investment as the area becomes increasingly popular.

While those who choose to semigrate are sometimes couples or even individuals, most who make the decision to semigrate are those with families, particularly young children. In my case, our family decided to semigrate from Johannesburg to Cape Town for several reasons. We opted for a coastal lifestyle where the kids could enjoy the outdoors and play on the beach, we based ourselves in an area with access to several good schools and took security into consideration too.

Johannesburg is only two hours by flight so commuting regularly is not an issue. I am still able to connect with my team, clients and partners with relative ease. By moving to Cape Town we have moved to one of the most beautiful cities in the world, can continue to enjoy the lifestyle that is offered in South Africa and through connectivity and an easy commute, can continue to operate the business in Johannesburg, which remains the business capital of South Africa.

The drawbacks

However, many who've done their best to leave the Big Smoke behind have found themselves unable to be rid of it entirely. The reasons for this are primarily economic, with Johannesburg still being the country's financial hub and therefore where the majority of the country's work opportunities are located.

Those who can afford it have found a workaround. Some businesspeople, like myself, for example, choose to stay in coastal provinces with their families on the weekends and travel to the country's major cities during the week for work. This situation can be less than ideal when factoring in transport costs, the environmental impact of frequent travel and the personal toll of spending long periods of time away from one's family.

The takeaway

Semigrating may not be as complicated a process as emigrating, but it still involves numerous financial and legal measures that are often unforeseen. Prior to taking the plunge, it is important to take note of every pro and con involved in the relocation. That's why before making this kind of life-altering decision I would recommend that every prospective semigrant consult with a property expert in their new area.

Ultimately, whether or not semigration is the right choice for you or your family is entirely dependent on your unique situation. One thing can, and should apply to everyone though, and that's the reminder that the grass is not greener on the other side just by virtue of it being on the other side. The grass is as green as you make it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grant Smeets has worked as an accountant at several large international financial institutions in London, including JPMorgan, Schroders and UBS, and as operational lead at a closed \$400 million private fund. Grant ventured from financial services into property investment and property services in London before returning to South Africa in 2010.

Today, Grant is the Managing Director of Only Realty, the founder of EHC Networking South Africa, OUST Eviction Management Solutions, and a variety of other innovative property solutions start-ups.

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