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REALTY

— Find your way home. —

Panic & Pack

The Hilarious Journey of Relocating

Real advice, personal stories, and practical tips
to help you navigate your next move with
confidence—and maybe even a laugh.



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A Note from Todd

I've moved enough times to know that the idea of relocating and the reality of relocating are two very different experiences. In your imagination, you close one door, open another, and begin an exciting new chapter. In real life, somebody can't find the tape, the moving truck is running late, and the dog has decided this would be an excellent day to stop cooperating.

But here's what I believe: a move can be one of the best decisions you ever make, provided you're honest about what you're looking for and willing to do the work. You can always recover from the truth. It's the surprises we refuse to investigate that tend to cost us money, time, and peace of mind.

This isn't a brochure designed to convince you that every move is a good move. It's a guide to asking better questions, preparing for the inevitable curveballs, and giving yourself the best opportunity to build a life that fits. I've included lessons from my own moves, including our relocation from New England to North Carolina, because some lessons are easier to remember when there's a story attached.

You don't need to give me your email address to use this guide. Take it, mark it up, share it with someone who needs it, and put it to work. If our paths cross down the road, wonderful. If they don't, I still hope it helps.

About the Author

I'm Todd Derksen, a North Carolina real estate broker with Wayfinder Realty, affiliated with Kinstle & Co. I've lived in several states and understand the difference between finding a house and finding a place where you belong. I work with buyers and sellers in Brunswick County and the surrounding area, and I believe good representation begins with listening, asking questions, and telling the truth.

Outside real estate, I enjoy cooking and sharing recipes through Sold on Flavor, spending time with my family and our Great Danes, and contributing to the community I call home. Those interests aren't separate from the work I do. They are reminders that a home matters because of the life happening inside it.

Contents

1. Deciding to Relocate
2. Financial Planning
3. Researching Your Destination
4. Finding a Place to Live
5. Preparing for the Move
6. Navigating Moving Day
7. Settling In
8. Overcoming Challenges
9. Building a Life That Lasts
10. The Moving Timeline & Checklist

1. Deciding to Relocate

The first question isn't where you want to go. It's what you want your life to look like when you get there. That sounds simple until you begin separating what you need from what merely sounds attractive.

Start with the why

A new job, family, retirement, affordability, a change of scenery—each is a legitimate reason to consider moving. But none is a substitute for understanding your priorities. Write down what is driving this decision, what you hope to gain, and what you're unwilling to give up. If you're moving with a spouse or family, have that conversation together before the first house tour.

My three-year search

Before our move from New England, I spent roughly three years considering where we should go. I wanted to stay on the East Coast, live near the coast, enjoy some change of seasons without the heavy snow, remain reasonably close to an airport, and find a place we could afford. Every one of those preferences came with a tradeoff. Coastal living, for example, also meant learning about hurricanes, flood zones, and insurance.

Think beyond the move

I also wanted to establish relationships before retirement rather than arrive later and hope a community would magically appear around me. That was part of our timing. Think about your own season of life: the people you'll miss, the commitments you're leaving, and the routines you hope to build. The right location on paper isn't always the right place to live.

A decision worth testing

Before you commit, ask yourself what could make the move a mistake. Don't ask the question to talk yourself out of moving. Ask it because a good decision should survive a little scrutiny. If the answer exposes a problem, you have an opportunity to solve it before it becomes expensive.

2. Financial Planning

I call it your bag of money. What do you want to accomplish, what resources do you have, and what will the entire decision cost—not just the truck and the closing table?

Build a realistic moving budget

Price the movers or truck, packing supplies, fuel, hotels, meals on the road, storage, utility deposits, pet arrangements, and temporary housing if the dates don't line up. Then add a cushion. The estimate you make before packing tends to look optimistic by the time you discover what you forgot in the garage.

Compare the complete cost of living

Look beyond the purchase price or rent. Compare property taxes, insurance, utilities, healthcare, transportation, groceries, maintenance, and the cost of getting back to see family. When we arrived in North Carolina, vehicle property taxes were a surprise. A lower cost in one category doesn't mean every category will be lower.

Rent or buy? It depends

Renting can give you time to learn an unfamiliar area without committing to a particular neighborhood. Buying may make sense when your finances, expected length of stay, and personal circumstances support it. There is no magic three-year rule that works for everyone. Transaction costs, financing terms, potential repairs, market conditions, and flexibility all matter. Run the numbers for your situation.

Protect your reserves

A move has a way of introducing you to expenses you didn't plan on. Keep an emergency reserve separate from the amount you've allocated for the move. The first appliance repair or unexpected hotel stay shouldn't force you to reach for a credit card you hadn't intended to use.

3. Researching Your Destination

You can learn a tremendous amount online, but there is no substitute for showing up and seeing a place with your own eyes. Vacationing somewhere and living there are two very different experiences.

Visit like a resident

Tour neighborhoods on weekdays and weekends. Drive the route to work or to the grocery store at the time you'd actually use it. Look for the pharmacy, healthcare providers, parks, and the kinds of restaurants you enjoy. Spend some time doing ordinary things, not just sightseeing.

Investigate the details

Review schools where relevant, employment opportunities, internet availability, medical access, community activities, and weather patterns. Coastal buyers should look carefully at flood risk, insurance, storm preparation, and maintenance. Confirm details with the appropriate official agency or qualified professional instead of relying on a neighbor's guess or an online comment.

Talk to people—and listen

Ask locals what they love and what frustrates them. Someone who has lived in a community for twenty years may notice things a visitor would never see. Keep an open mind: one person's dealbreaker is another person's minor inconvenience. You're collecting perspectives, not taking a vote.

Be honest about your personality

If you thrive on activity, a very quiet neighborhood may lose its charm once the novelty wears off. If you want privacy, a packed social calendar won't suddenly become appealing because you're near the ocean. Choose for the person you are, not the person you imagine a new ZIP code will turn you into.

4. Finding a Place to Live

The house is important. So is everything outside its front door. Your goal is to find a place that supports the life you're trying to build.

Choose the community first

Look at commute times, traffic, noise, nearby services, recreational opportunities, and the feel of the neighborhood at different times of day. Think about your needs five years from now as well as the ones you have today. A beautiful kitchen won't fix a location that doesn't work for you.

Work with someone who knows the market

A knowledgeable local real estate professional can help you understand the process, evaluate options, and identify questions worth asking. Be candid about your budget, preferences, and dealbreakers. I often say that the quality of the answer depends on the quality of the information you provide. Don't make your agent guess.

Understand the costs and the paperwork

For buyers, examine financing, inspections, due diligence requirements, insurance, association rules, and closing costs with the appropriate professionals. For renters, understand deposits, lease terms, renewal conditions, and restrictions. Rules and market conditions vary by location, so verify the details that apply to your transaction.

Plan for a gap

Sometimes the closing date moves, the rental isn't ready, or construction takes longer than expected. Consider short-term lodging, storage, and a backup arrangement before you're forced to make an expensive decision under pressure.

5. Preparing for the Move

If you've ever opened a closet and wondered how one family accumulated so much stuff, welcome to the club. The moving process has a remarkable ability to expose every purchase you've ever made.

Downsize before you pay to move it

Before our move, we filled four dumpsters and donated truckloads of belongings. It was liberating. Start early and work room by room. Keep what you use or value, donate what someone else can use, sell what is worth the effort, and responsibly dispose of the rest. Don't pay a moving company to transport things you already know you don't want.

Choose the right moving approach

Full-service movers cost more but take on much of the physical work. A do-it-yourself move can save money but demands time, equipment, and help. A hybrid approach—renting the truck and hiring labor at each end—may strike the right balance. Get written estimates, check credentials and insurance, and understand how claims are handled.

Think about the animals

Our move from New England involved four dogs, two cats, a car, a truck, and a 26-foot moving van. What we thought would be a twelve-hour trip became a twenty-four-hour adventure through rain and the hills of Pennsylvania. Pets need breaks, water, safe restraints, medication, and a plan for overnight stops. Don't assume they'll appreciate your schedule.

Pack for the first night

Keep identification, important documents, medications, chargers, toiletries, a change of clothes, pet supplies, snacks, and basic kitchen items where you can reach them. Label boxes with both contents and destination rooms. You don't want to be digging through thirty identical boxes at midnight because nobody knows where the toothpaste went.

6. Navigating Moving Day

Moving day is when your careful plan meets real life. Something will probably change. The objective isn't perfection; it's keeping a manageable problem from turning into a disaster.

Give people clear responsibilities

Decide who will supervise loading, who will handle the pets, who will confirm travel details, and who will perform the final walkthrough. Keep your documents and essentials with you rather than on the truck. Photograph valuable items and the condition of your home where useful.

Confirm services before arrival

Arrange electricity, water, internet, and any other essential services before moving day. Verify dates and required deposits. If you need an installer, book early and have a backup plan for work or school if the connection isn't ready.

Leave room for the unexpected

Weather, traffic, delays, and a missing box can test your patience. Keep some cash or available funds for emergencies, communicate with the people involved, and avoid turning every setback into a crisis. I've learned that a little humor makes a long day feel shorter, even when the day turns out to be very long.

Don't ignore the goodbyes

Moving isn't just a logistical exercise. You're leaving people and familiar places behind. Make time to say goodbye properly. The relationships you built don't have to end because your address changes.

7. Settling In

The truck pulls away, the boxes are stacked in every room, and suddenly you're standing in a house that doesn't quite feel like yours yet. That part takes time.

Make the home functional first

Start with beds, bathrooms, and the kitchen. You don't need to unpack every picture frame before you can live comfortably. Set up a few familiar things and give yourself permission to finish the rest gradually.

Handle the administrative work

Update your address, driver's license, vehicle registration, insurance, voter registration, and other records as applicable. Check the official requirements and deadlines for your new state and locality. Transfer medical records, identify nearby providers, and confirm any pet requirements.

Build routines and explore

Find the grocery store, pharmacy, a favorite coffee spot, and the route you'll drive most often. Visit a park. Try a local restaurant. Attend an event. The sooner you become familiar with ordinary life in your new area, the sooner it begins to feel like home.

Start conversations

One former client jokingly told me she thought I was the mayor because I spoke so passionately about the community. I took that as a compliment. Learn what makes your new place special, and don't be shy about introducing yourself to the people who live there.

8. Overcoming Challenges

Even a well-planned relocation can come with homesickness, unexpected costs, and the uncomfortable feeling that everybody else already knows where they belong. Those feelings deserve attention, not denial.

Expect an adjustment period

You may miss the friends, routines, or familiar streets you left behind. Keep in touch with the people who matter, but don't spend all your energy looking backward. A new life won't build itself while you're waiting for it to feel like the old one.

Be intentional about friendship

Join an organization, volunteer, take a class, or participate in an activity you enjoy. You don't need a hundred acquaintances. A few meaningful connections can make an enormous difference, and they usually begin because someone was willing to show up more than once.

Respond to setbacks with a plan

If the job changes, the budget gets tight, or the house needs an unexpected repair, assess the problem and decide what you can control. Ask for help when you need it. Not every surprise is funny in the moment, but many become stories you can laugh about later.

Celebrate the small victories

The first dinner in your new home, the first neighbor who remembers your name, the first drive you make without navigation—these moments count. A move is a collection of small adjustments, not one giant switch that flips the moment you receive the keys.

9. Building a Life That Lasts

A successful relocation isn't measured only by whether the boxes arrived intact. It's measured by what you build once the unpacking is over.

Give the first year a purpose

Set a few realistic goals. Explore a new part of your community each month. Find an activity you enjoy. Make your home comfortable. Meet people. Revisit your budget after the initial moving expenses settle down.

Stay connected without standing still

Invite family and friends to visit. Schedule calls and make plans to return when possible. At the same time, invest in the relationships and experiences available where you live now. You can honor the place you came from without letting it prevent you from enjoying where you are.

Be willing to adjust

Check in with yourself after a few months. What's working? What isn't? Sometimes a small change in routine, a new organization, or a different approach to your social life makes a bigger difference than you expect. You don't have to get every detail right on the first try.

Pay it forward

Once you've found your footing, help someone else. Share a recommendation, welcome a new neighbor, or offer the perspective you wish someone had given you. A community becomes stronger when the people who live there decide to contribute to it.

11. Final Thoughts

Relocating is a big decision. It asks you to leave some things behind, carry others with you, and build something new before you know exactly how it will turn out. That's exciting, and at times it can be frightening. Both can be true.

My advice is to do the homework, be realistic about the money, ask questions until you understand the answers, and remember that a successful move involves far more than the property you purchase or rent. It's about the people, routines, opportunities, and memories you create once you arrive.

You can always recover from the truth. Start there, and give yourself the best possible chance to enjoy the adventure. When the boxes are gone and the moving truck is a distant memory, I hope you can look around and say you've found your way home.

MOVING DAY MASTER CHECKLIST

Print this page. Put it on the refrigerator. Check things off as you go.

THREE TO SIX MONTHS BEFORE

- ☐ Clarify why you are moving and agree on priorities with everyone involved.
- ☐ Compare locations, costs, employment, schools, healthcare, and everyday services.
- ☐ Visit potential destinations and test ordinary routines.
- ☐ Build a complete budget, including reserves for unexpected expenses.
- ☐ Decide whether renting or buying best fits your circumstances.

TWO TO THREE MONTHS BEFORE

- ☐ Interview moving companies or plan your DIY or hybrid move.
- ☐ Verify credentials, coverage, estimates, and cancellation terms.
- ☐ Begin sorting belongings: keep, donate, sell, recycle, or discard.
- ☐ Gather important documents and identify items requiring special handling.
- ☐ Research temporary lodging, storage, and pet travel needs.

FOUR TO SIX WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Confirm moving dates and transportation.
- ☐ Begin packing infrequently used items and label each box.
- ☐ Schedule utility transfers and internet installation.
- ☐ Arrange medical records, school records, and prescription refills.
- ☐ Prepare a plan for pets, vehicles, and valuables.

ONE TO TWO WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Confirm movers, helpers, lodging, and travel plans.
- ☐ Set aside documents, medications, chargers, and first-night essentials.
- ☐ Update your address and notify key institutions.

ONE TO TWO WEEKS BEFORE

- ☐ Photograph valuables or property condition where appropriate.
- ☐ Check the weather and confirm a backup plan.

MOVING DAY

- ☐ Keep important documents and essentials with you.
- ☐ Supervise loading and record any problems.
- ☐ Complete a final walkthrough and secure the old home.
- ☐ Provide water, breaks, and safe transport for pets.
- ☐ Confirm arrival instructions and contact details.

AFTER ARRIVAL

- ☐ Set up beds, bathrooms, and basic kitchen supplies first.
- ☐ Confirm utilities and internet work.
- ☐ Update licenses, registrations, insurance, and other records as required.
- ☐ Locate healthcare, grocery stores, and essential services.
- ☐ Meet neighbors and explore local activities.

FIRST YEAR

- ☐ Revisit your budget and adjust routines.
- ☐ Build friendships and get involved in your community.
- ☐ Keep meaningful connections with family and friends elsewhere.
- ☐ Reflect on what is working and what needs to change.
- ☐ Share what you learned with the next person making a move.