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International Relocation Success in 6 Steps

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I often get asked the question: "What makes an expat relocation successful?" or "How can people to settle into their new home quickly?"

Part of the answer is quite simple -- regardless of where you're moving to or from. The secret is mostly in the planning and preparation -- getting organized. Thorough research is crucial. More importantly, though, is knowing what to expect: Get your bearings, speak to people who have had the experience, make an effort to understand the culture. Too often, misguided expectations result in more acute culture shock and disappointment. Be realistic. This will get you much of the way there. You can avoid anticipatory stress -- the feeling of not knowing what is around the corner, or the helpless feeling you can get. This causes immense anxiety and undue stress.

The other part can be somewhat less controllable, but can be managed all the same. Your mindset and attitude toward the move, and getting in the right frame of mind can mean the difference between expat glory or abject failure. Positivity is important, as is the desire to make it work. However, it is crucial that this optimism is founded on research and getting a full picture of what adventure lies ahead. Blissful optimism, simply based on wanting, or desperately needing, change can end in tears. It's a tough balance to strike.

Here are six steps to plan, navigate and handle a relocation. Make sure you begin before the decision is even made about moving overseas to get you off to the right start:

The S.E.T.T.L.E. in six steps process:

Size up

Firstly, and crucially, assess whether the move is right for you. An international move can be exciting but daunting. Moving from family and friends, upsetting your immediate family life -- you might feel guilty and worry about missing out. This is natural. Once you decide that expat life is for you, there are your wants, needs and criteria to assess -- what do you want your new life to be like? What elements of your life do you need to replicate to feel settled? What aspects of your new life do you expect to be challenging? How much will the move cost? How will you cope with being away from your loved ones?

Embark

An international relocation is complex and time consuming. A roller coaster of emotions might ensue: apprehension, nervousness, overwhelm, stress, sadness, impatience -- these are all part of the process. Effective planning is a must, and extensive paperwork is unavoidable. This step is all about the administration and tasks you need to complete so that your move is stress-free. Do you have the legal right to work (visa) in the country you're moving to? Are your skills recognized in the country you're moving to -- will you need to re-qualify or top-up your existing qualifications? Do you have pets you'd like to take with you? Your home and possessions -- ensure that you leave enough time to handle the logistics. Tax, money and administrative matters require military organization to ensure nothing is missed and that you're aware of your compliance obligations at home, and in your new home country.

Take up residence

Weeks and months of planning have passed and now you've arrived in your new country. You'll be feeling a little anxious and scared. At the same time, you'll feel disorientated and at times, frustrated with having to navigate a new system. Key to this step is your home set-up, establishing a routine, and as much as possible, replicate the essential elements of your life so that you can function and live here. You'll need to choose a home that suits your needs, in an area that feels comfortable. Ensure that the schools, amenities and public transport have been considered. Get your bearings and start to establish a routine for your weekly tasks.

Tackle the necessities

It is important that you know what registrations and other set-up tasks you need to manage in order to be compliant. Leaving your home country will have wiped the slate clean, or at least put your existence there on hold. It is time to build your identity in new home -- something you may not have done for many years, or even thought consciously about when doing them in your home country. Driving licenses, bank accounts, credit cards, medical registrations, tax office registration, insurances -- all crucial to creating an existence and compliance in your new home country.

Learn the ropes

You're settled and have a home. The next natural step is to assimilate to the new culture. This can also be the time when the "honeymoon" excitement can fade. You might feel irritated and self-conscious that you don't know how things work. There will be nuances to learn, and knowing how to get things done with the minimal fuss. Here, you also start to develop a deeper insight into your new environment. Learning the slang, or a new language altogether, will be important to help you feel acclimatized and less isolated. Learning how things work -- driving habits, attitudes to drinking, smoking, equality, freedom, dressing appropriately, the media landscape, general etiquette. A keen understanding of these will help immensely in achieving a sense of home.

Explore and discover

The final step of settling in involves making new friends, feeling at ease with the culture and way of life of your new home country. You will also start to establish more of a life and routine. It is important at this stage that you make huge effort to build a social life and lifestyle routine. The practical phases are complete, and you want (and need) to start making the most of your time in your new home. Eating and drinking out, leisure activities, weekend or day trips to explore your surrounds, joining a sports team or learning about the local nature and wildlife. All of these elements that 'feed your soul' become necessary at this stage, now that the dust and upheaval of the move are behind you.

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