

# A Job Abroad?

There are two considerations that should shape your decision on whether to move to take up a new job overseas – and neither has to do with the job itself. Diane Lemieux looks at the issues surrounding the question of deciding to go or not to go.

By Diane Lemieux

**T**o work in a new country means that everything in your daily life will change: your routines, your work-life balance, the food you eat, etc, etc. You will experience emotional highs and lows. There is the adrenalin rush of excitement over the opportunities of the future, alongside the turmoil of leaving friends and family and the security of your established environment. Once at your destination, you will deal with the reality of having to function in an unknown environment 24 hours a day, seven days a week, for months on end. This is no short-term holiday but a long-term investment in a whole new life. Not only do the conditions of your life change, but you, as an individual, will also emerge changed from the experience. Studies of the internationally mobile workforce show that individuals develop skills and attitudes such as flexibility, empathy towards others and an increased ability to deal with insecurity and the unfamiliar situations. People learn new languages, broaden their perspective on the world, and expand their social network.

## Do You Want Change?

Given the transformation you will necessarily experience, the first point to consider when decid-

ing whether to take up employment abroad relates to whether you are ready to accept the challenge of dealing with that change. The dilemma of the choice between continuity and change is brilliantly depicted in *The Hobbit*. Bilbo Baggins struggles to overcome his natural desire for stability and routine in the face of discomfort and insecurity and the inevitable change that accompanies the mission he is asked to join. Once he decides to join the dwarves on their quest, he fully accepts the consequences of that decision and does his best to succeed.

In other words, to accept an employment opportunity abroad is to embark on an adventure. The ability to view a move abroad as an adventure creates a framework for dealing with the challenges of the move. So, if you've decided to take the plunge, fostering a spirit of discovery and personal challenge helps you maintain a positive attitude throughout the experience.

Furthermore, in good adventure stories, the heroes face one difficulty after another and, through their resourcefulness and determination, eventually succeed in their quest and live 'happily ever after'. One of the elements of their success is the fact that they have a very clear goal: to help the dwarves reclaim their homeland, for example. The goal of the international employee is more humble but equally epic: to recreate a different though equally good life at your destination. In other words, you are not just moving to take on a new job: you are moving to create a whole new life for yourself.

## Do You Want The Location?

Let's imagine that your passion and weekly hobby is mountain climbing – but you have identified a dream job for yourself in mountain-less country. How long and how well will you be able to do your job if you cannot partake in your passion when not at work?

This question points to the second element to consider when deciding whether to take up employment abroad: the conditions of the country in which the job is located. Your decision to accept the new job needs to take into account a realistic assessment of the conditions at that location: the local culture and the type of people you are likely to meet, the geography and climate, and the socio-economic conditions that affect things like your housing and daily means of transportation. What opportunities and what challenges do these conditions impose on your daily life?

There is no better way to predict the future (your ultimately happy life at your destination) than to create it. In other words, by being clear about the opportunities and challenges your destination offers before you arrive on location, you can plan how to build your life within those conditions. For instance, in the case of the mountain climber, easy access to an indoor climbing centre

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and the ability to take holidays in the mountains may be the solution to this work-life balance issue.

But we can never know exactly what we will find at any given location. An adventure will, by definition, present unexpected twists in the plot. No matter how well prepared you are, your expectations may not always be met, which can lead to disappointment: what if the conveniently placed climbing wall closed before your arrival? In establishing your new life abroad you will need to consider various aspects of your life including your job, your hobbies, your work-life balance, your new home, new friends and new routines. Your life abroad will be different from what you have now, but should be satisfying – however you define ‘satisfying’. You will probably not be successful at your job if you are unhappy in your life.

### Emotional Ups and Downs

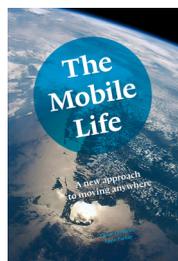
The emotional ups and downs during the process of establishing a new life at a new location are often called ‘culture shock’. The term is misleading because there are many other aspects of the country that affect your daily life beyond ‘culture’. Culture includes things like the way locals do things, the way they communicate and the way they expect you to behave. As in the case of our mountain climber, the fact that there are no mountains in the country has nothing to do with the local culture. You may, for example, find the fact that you have no close friends or weekly routines more difficult to deal with than the local culture. In fact, how you experience the process of establishing a new life for yourself at your destination has less to do with the conditions of

your country than on the two considerations mentioned above, namely a) how determined you are to deal with the change you face, and b) how realistic your expectations were.

### The Steps You Take

Moving to a new country is an adventure during which you will necessarily experience ups and downs. The decision to accept a job abroad needs to take into account the fact that you as an individual will change as a result of your adventure, as will your daily life depending on the conditions at your location. If you are finding it difficult to settle into a new life, waiting for ‘culture shock’ to pass will not help. The steps you take to establish your life on a daily basis will determine how you feel about your life in whichever country you have chosen to live. ❧

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This article is drawn from the book *The Mobile Life: A New Approach to Moving Anywhere*, by Diane Lemieux and Anne Parker.



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