

## Considering working abroad???

Simon Cairns, General Manager of Law Firm Staff, a leader in placement solutions for law firms and corporations, considers the options of spending a period working abroad.

Have you ever thought of spending a year or two working overseas? Do London's bright lights beckon you? Or does eating a breakfast baguette while walking to work along the beautiful, cobbled streets in Paris appeal to you?

Spending time working abroad brings richness to both your work life and personal experiences. You would be surprised at the multitude of exhilarating differences you can experience while doing a new job—or even your current job—in a foreign city, even when you are working in a city where you're speaking the same language as you do now! It's quite possible to enjoy these cultural differences while gaining quality work experience that will enhance your career.

In fact, a legal background can provide an excellent foundation upon which you can build while traveling and working overseas. Many legal professionals who have worked overseas for a period of time say that the experience was one of the highlights of their careers, and that the time spent abroad was priceless. Moreover, if you plan correctly, working overseas can greatly enhance your career by improving your employment prospects when you return home.

Now that you've decided to spend some time abroad, don't quit your job and buy a plane

ticket just yet! Getting the most out of the experience of working abroad takes time and serious planning. You should expect to spend 12 -18 months planning and making your move.

### **Making Your Move**

First, you will need to find a job overseas. Start by examining possibilities at your present place of employment. One of the easiest ways to work in another country is by transferring with your current employer to an overseas office. Inter-office transfers can take as little as two or three months (although the process can take substantially longer depending on the visa restrictions and allocations of the destination country). Many attorneys, legal secretaries and paralegals, IT professionals, and human resources professionals have been able to transfer overseas through their current employer for a six-month period, or even longer.

However, if your company does not have an office in the country in which you wish to work, all is not lost. Consider your options. Does your spouse work for a company with an office in your desired country, and could he or she transfer to that office? If so, you're in luck! Moving abroad with your spouse will generally entitle you to secure a spousal visa. However, these visas do generally contain certain restrictions that you will have to consider. For instance, some countries will not allow spouses to work, while others will. Other countries are willing to grant visas to those with family

members (grandparents, for example) who reside in the destination country. Securing this type of visa is advantageous in that it allows the holder to not only secure work once overseas, but also to be eligible to accept temporary and contract work. (More about temporary work to follow).

If you can't transfer abroad through your employer or with your spouse, you will need to start your job search from scratch. First, choose the country you'd like to work in. Then, check with that country's consulate services to see what visa requirements you will need to meet. Check out the U.S. State Department's link to world embassies and consulates for more information.

<http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/dpl/32122.htm>

### **Transferable Skills**

A wide range of skills are in demand overseas. Those with technical backgrounds such as IT/programming are sought after in many countries. Those with high level litigation support and e-discovery experience are often in great demand in Europe and Australia. Overseas work for US legal staff generally tends to be restricted to those with very good corporate, M&A, and securitization experience. Attorneys and IT professionals are generally more likely to be sponsored by an overseas employer than paralegals and other key legal support staff. In general, attorney level work is supervised by a local attorney, so most attorney candidates do not have to qualify as an attorney licensed in the destination country. However, this is not always the case, so check with the bar licensure organization in your destination country.

If you are hoping to secure a work visa independently, your experience must be outstanding (and your academic record as well)! Litigators can have considerably more difficulty in finding work abroad, particularly in countries that use a common law system. Although you may not be able to litigate abroad, you can still use your skills in many ways, particularly if you are able to undertake contract work. In addition to attorneys, paralegals are also used extensively in many countries, both on a long-term and contract basis. US-trained paralegals are sought after, particularly those from Am Law 100 and 200 firms. Again, corporate and M&A paralegals are most highly sought after and attract the highest paralegal salaries.

### **Contract work**

If you are able to secure contract work, this is an excellent way to start building up financial reserves in a new country. For those with relevant experience, contract work is generally in plentiful supply, especially in major cities. Since litigation and corporate work can frequently require a steady stream of contract personnel, many countries have legal staffing agencies that can assist you with securing temporary work. To land your first assignment as quickly as possible, make sure that you have copies of your relevant qualifications along with a resume and references.

Contract attorneys can earn a great deal of money, as can legal secretaries. Temporary work also provides you a flexible schedule so that you can enjoy taking trips to explore

your new destination. After all, part of the experience of working abroad is to enjoy the culture of your host country. Make sure that you travel as much as you can while abroad.

### **Visa Services**

There are many visa agencies in the US and in Europe that can assist you with securing the appropriate visa. An internet search will show you the key agencies working in this market. Look for agencies operating in your destination country too and it's well worth comparing them to a visa service in the US. Factor in exchange rates to your calculations too!

### **Languages**

If you're considering working in a country to learn the language, prepare yourself for an uphill battle to find work. You'll find it a lot easier if you speak the language of your desired country fluently. Some foreign employers won't even consider your candidacy if you don't have the requisite language skills, no matter how strong your work experience. In France, for instance, you simply will not be considered for employment if you don't speak French at a very high level of proficiency.

### **Don't forget your furniture!**

Many workers simply rent their home or condo to a friend, along with the furniture, before moving abroad. If funds are a little tight, this is the right thing to do. Leave your furniture at home and lease a furnished

apartment in your new host country. If you plan to bring your furniture with you, check the rates of at least three international shipping companies and ensure that any shipping contract that you agree to is in writing, is "all inclusive" in that it covers all import taxes, and provides that your items will be moved door to door. Many people who have moved abroad without insisting on these provisions have wound up with horror stories about their move, including being stuck with a huge import tax bill that they had to pay before they could get their furniture. Not a great way to start your overseas experience! Some shipping agreements contain provisions in small print for a "door to sidewalk" service. This means that you must either pay more to the delivery men to have your items moved inside, or alternatively, moving all your furniture in from the sidewalk by yourself. Although shipping can be expensive, as with many things in life, "you get what you pay for."

### **Conclusions**

The key to a successful experience working abroad is to choose a country that you think you will genuinely enjoy and then, and after ensuring that you can meet the country's visa requirements, formulating implementing a plan by which you can make a smooth relocation. Although moving abroad does take some planning, it is well worth the incredible experience you will gain by seeing a new country. Believe it or not, almost 70% of Americans do not have a passport! This is understandable. America is diverse and has everything that you could

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ever wish to see, from beaches to mountains and cities to deserts. However, traveling and working overseas for a year or two provides an experience that moving to another city in the US doesn't come close to meeting. And here is more good news to end on: the working hours in the US are some of the longest of any country in the world. Many US companies work 48 or 50 weeks out of

the 52 weeks every year. It's likely that your destination country will have considerably more generous paid vacation time. Even US companies overseas generally conform to the host country's vacation averages. Securing employment overseas can provide you with up to six weeks paid vacation time every year. That's not a bad incentive to travel is it?