



Arrival

It is not the purpose of this document to address immigration procedures and issues. However we will mention this – make sure you know the visa circumstances under which you are entering the country. The school will inform you if you arriving as a visitor or with an employment visa, which will then determine how you proceed through passport control. Once you have arrived in your new country it is recommended that you organize your priorities to allow a smooth transition into your new home.

Checking out the local amenities

Most employers will have a welcome food pack for you just to get you started, comprised of tea-bags, bread, milk, things like that. Make sure you ask your contact as to the location of the local shop. No doubt the school will have a program of activities organized for you related to your social and professional orientation. The former will entail city tours, shopping trips, information sessions and evenings out, but you will need to stock your fridge with the basics as soon as you can. You may want to check the apartment inventory; if you have not brought them with you, you will want to buy sheets, pillow cases and other soft furnishings. Is there a kettle, a toaster, an iron, a mop?

Confirming the schedule

Sometimes your head teacher or head of department will pick you up at the airport; of course this will give you the perfect opportunity to discuss the plan of action for the next few days, like when you will be expected into school, the details of the orientation program and similar. If a driver or school representative is meeting you then this will not be possible so you need to know how to contact your new manager once you arrive. The driver may confirm to the school that you have been collected and settled in, and they will contact you at the apartment in due course.

Calling home

It is important to notify your relatives back home that you have arrived safely. They too must understand that you need a moment to settle in and orientate yourself. You may want to find an internet café, use your own mobile if you can, get some coins to use a public pay phone or organise a new SIM card. If you are going into school the next day they may allow you the quick use of a telephone.

Forming your own opinions

As you are working in an international school, you are lucky to have a built in network of experienced expatriates to rely on for advice and information. Remember that everyone's experiences and taste will be different and we recommend that you listen to advice but be prepared to make up your own mind.

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Arrival – culture shock

Culture shock describes the impact of moving from a familiar culture to one which is unfamiliar. It is an experience that affects almost everyone who lives and works abroad. Culture shock is the result of being removed from your familiar surroundings, culture norms, family, friends, support network and ways of living and immersing yourself in something new and foreign whilst trying to function effectively.

Elements contributing to culture shock

The climate will be different. Depending on which country you are moving to you may need to be aware of dehydration and sun stroke and take preventative measures. The food will be very different but rest assured there are many familiar supermarket brands, familiar restaurants and fast food joints to supply your comfort food as you settle in. The language can be a barrier, but most people speak a reasonable competency of English language. You may need to adjust your dress sense in accordance with local culture; more out of courtesy than necessity. Social roles may surprise or offend you particularly the relationship between men and women that may be more formal to what you are used to.

The working environment

Elements such as curriculum, reporting, parental contact, discipline and roles, will have different procedures and you will need to learn to adapt to your new school's rules and expectations. The rules of behaviour will be different. Every culture has unspoken rules that affect the way people treat each other and you can expect them to vary from country to country. It is very disorientating when you realize that the assumptions you have grown up with regarding punctuality, work ethic, attitudes, values, and manners are often not applicable anymore. As far as possible, try to suspend judgment until you understand how the parts of the culture fit together in a coherent whole. Try to see what people say or do in the context of their own cultural norms. Once you understand your new culture more fully, you will probably find some aspects of your new and old culture that you like and others that you do not like.

Phasing of culture shock

The Honeymoon Phase is one of excitement. You are stimulated and curious by the new surroundings, the new culture and the new job. It is like being on holiday. The Distress Phase in about 1 to 2 months' time is one of frustration, when the differences really start to grate on you. You find it a chore to get the simplest things done because nothing is the same and it is also draining. You may feel confused, isolated and inadequate as the cultural differences intrude and familiar supports are not immediately available.



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You miss your friends, family and surroundings. You may find your feelings go back and forth from 'I love this place' to 'I hate this place'. The Re-Integration Phase, begins with 'the low point' when you are rejecting the differences you encounter. You feel angry, frustrated and hostile towards the new culture and you are mainly conscious of how much you dislike it compared to home. You embrace and glorify the previous culture, forgetting what you didn't like about it in the first place. So from the low point there is only one way to go, as these negative feelings begin to pass as you become more familiar with your new culture and place of work. This phase often peaks at about 2-4 months into your assignment. The Autonomy phase is one of acceptance of the differences and similarities and you feel more relaxed and confident because of your growing experiences. You still notice the differences but they don't seem quite so difficult to overcome. Your sense of humour returns. The Independence phase is one when the differences and similarities are valued and important to you now. You may feel full of potential and you are able to trust yourself in all kinds of situations. Most situations become enjoyable and you know what to expect.

Dealing with culture shock

It is important to become familiar with your new culture before you go. You can also read 'The Culture Shock' book series that is highly recommended, available from all good book stores or at www.amazon.co.uk. Understand that culture shock is a normal experience and all new expatriates will suffer the same. Keep in touch with family and friends by e-mail, letter and telephone. There will be many familiar things around you - read the newspapers from back home in the local Starbucks, pig out in McDonalds and when you are plugged in catch your old TV favorites like 'Eastenders', 'Doctor Who', 'Rachel Ray', 'Location, Location, Location', 'Top Gear' and lots more! Go out and experience the new culture; do not isolate yourself from it even if it may seem more comfortable to do so. The more you learn first-hand the more quickly you will understand and accept it. Take regular exercise and find a supplier of familiar foods if possible. Develop a support network and try not be by yourself. Find someone who is able to listen, and also cultivate friendships with experienced expatriates who can help you settle in more quickly.

Expectations of your new job

Expect that the curriculum, planning requirements, management style, cultural norms and facilities will be different than what you are used to (or have been expecting). Expect that you will need to keep an open mind and conform to your new school's requirements. You are experienced teachers, and even if you are new to the profession, a grown adult with life experiences, so you should be able to demonstrate a degree of flexibility and adaptability from the beginning. Some of the rules and requirements may seem silly or irritating but avoid passing judgment as it must be taken in context with the school, parents, history and local culture. Expect that the school will help



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you get settled. They are used to hosting new expatriate teachers and it is in their best interest that you are successful.

Some schools will have a mentoring system, and if you are sharing an apartment they will no doubt ensure that you are living with a colleague of a similar background, culture, gender and age. Expect parental involvement; they are sending their children to these schools with the expectation of academic results. Expect a number of pupils in your class for whom English is not their first language. Find out how you might accommodate them effectively.

Budgeting effectively

We have already advised that you need to have adequate funds to last you through the first month before your first payment. You need to find out when you get paid and how. Check with the school if they are opening a bank account for you; or at the very least ask for advice about how to do it. Please remember that you will need a residency visa to open a bank account. With few exceptions you will be paid in local currency so as to avoid conversion fees, it makes sense to have a local bank account.

Concluding remarks

We ask you to use your common sense. If it is stupid in Birmingham, it will be stupid in Bangkok. You will be subject to local laws and regulations just like everyone else, so be aware of them and the penalties, and please abide by them, regardless of what you might think of them.

Become familiar with the procedures for obtaining emergency health and law enforcement in your new country. Inform family and trusted friends about your relocation and furnish them with emergency contact numbers. Make sure you understand the scope and limitations of your school's medical coverage both in country and whilst you are traveling outside the country.

Make sure you have the contact information for your local embassy. It is recommended that you register with them so you can be contacted in the case of an emergency and send you relevant information pertaining to expatriates in the country.

You are about to embark on an exciting adventure, one that will change your perceptions, attitude and outlook on the world around you. Remember to keep an open mind, be flexible and adaptable, and most importantly to have fun!

We hope that you enjoy your Teachanywhere overseas experience