

5 Positive Side Effects of Moving Abroad

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Retirement Rehab



I'm generally a very positive person but some time ago I sensed I was becoming less so. I noticed I was not consciously as grateful as usual. In fact, I even looked at others with some envy.

This all changed very dramatically when I moved overseas in 2014.

What I really realized is that by relocating overseas I could almost totally reinvent my mindset and myself. Once I started rejecting some long-held beliefs, the whole process kicked into over-drive.

- Could I do this in the US? Maybe. But I can thrive living overseas.

Time to Explore

In my routine, I had been conditioned to check three newspapers before I went to work. In the evening I watched overseas news. Combine this with all the conversations you get into and it ends up being an enormous time sink.

Now my mornings are filled with reading something I'm really interested in. I may check out the next place we will travel too or research a new attraction in our new home country. I've always had too little time to read the stack of books I keep. I realized this was always my choice, but now it's my priority.

The huge benefit here is I'm more engaged with my family. I have younger kids and we have more fun together now. My wife and I aren't only locked into the normal conversation about our "routine".

Less Stress

It's great getting settled into a new country. Everything is new and exciting. Taken with an open mind, you can deal with the problems easily. The real surprise comes when you get into a routine. In the US this had become a grind.

Most news is bad news. That sells. I get it, but I don't have to let it dominate my life.

Overseas most people aren't so consumed by politics. Local news is much more practical and even a touch entertaining.

For sure you don't have people getting despondent over politics. Most expats I know are more removed for their home country shenanigans.

As an expat worker, there are two enormous differences:

1. Work ends when you leave the office. Email at night is rare and even rarer on weekends.
2. Vacation leave is sacrosanct. Nobody bothers you. Ever.

Moving abroad takes a lot of the stress from a daily routine and is a much better balanced living experience.

Freedom to Speak

Once you break the addiction of talking about the latest news updates, you have the freedom to pick what to talk about. Couple this with people from an enormous variety of cultures and backgrounds and a whole new world of conversation topics opens up.

Other expatriates and locals are fascinating. Most people are keen to tell you about their country and their travels. I'm never stumped to find something interesting to engage people about. In fact, sometimes I feel a bit like I have less to offer.

My wife correctly accuses me of talking to almost anyone. I'm a sales guy and it comes natural to me. For example, If the taxi driver is from Pakistan, I try to guess Peshawar, Islamabad, or Lahore. Speaking to people requires someone to go first and I never waste the opportunity.

Talking to new and interesting people you meet abroad is simply something you must experience to appreciate.

It's Less About Stuff

Living in the US, we always had more room for more stuff. As a family grows the amount of stuff can expand to fill whatever room is available, if allowed. We should never have bought most of it in the first place. We fell prey to the rampant consumerism in the States.

On the other hand, expat families travel light. By design, they move more frequently. This penalizes hoarding and encourages more thoughtful consumption.

We implemented a process where we made a list of things we each wanted. We were shocked that most of the stuff we wanted rarely survived two weeks on the list.

Now we also spend less money on our stuff.

Life Is Less Complicated

Long commutes by car are mostly time wasted. Plane flights allow me to work or read, but they also take me away from my family. When I moved overseas I ditched all of this. Now I can take a cab to my office in less than 10 minutes.

This is just the easy to understand logistics, but living abroad is about having **a new mindset**.

First, decide on who you want to be and then reimagine and reinvent yourself. We all end up taking on a persona in life, the good and bad attributes. When you relocate abroad you have a unique—maybe once in a lifetime—opportunity to be who you aspire to be, not who you ended up being.

Second, determine what your priorities are. Americans cave into work obligations like nobody else on the planet. It's just silly when you see it from abroad.

If this means you don't want to miss an event your kids are in, then schedule it. The same holds true for workouts, vacations, etc.

When you aren't constantly struggling to balance between your personal priorities and work obligations, life is more fulfilling.

Third, don't sweat the small stuff. You have permission. Living overseas means things will be organized differently. It's not usually controllable.

When I realized my new life had all these new little jiggles, I gave myself permission to not care. I don't want to understate this, but this simple shift in mindset brings me happiness every day.

Americans aren't wired like that. The culture is all about obsessing over the limited amount of free time we allow ourselves.

Small changes compound rapidly. Try to adopt some of these lessons I've learned from moving overseas.

Better yet, join me living and working abroad.

Ian Bond

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