

MEANINGFUL TRAVEL TIPS AND TALES

FIRST TIME WORKING ABROAD



An Initiative to Make Travel More Accessible



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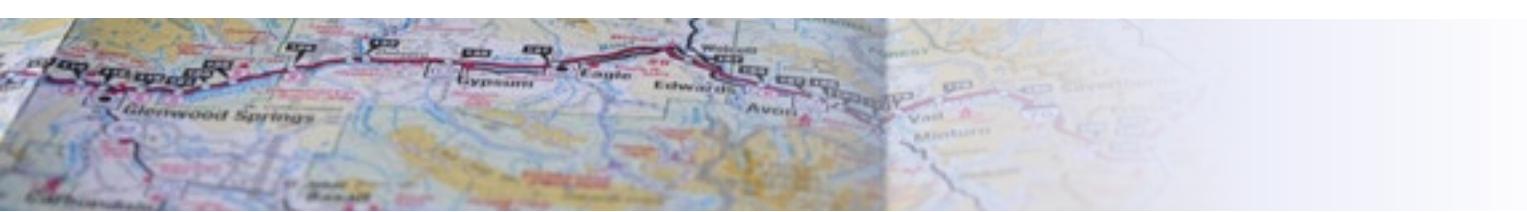
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WHY WE CREATED THIS BOOK FOR FIRST TIME EXPATS WORKING ABROAD

A NOTE FROM GOABROAD



Working abroad for the first time can seem overwhelming and no one knows that better than we do. That's why we scoured our expert articles directory to come up with a comprehensive resource of tips for first time expats embarking on a work abroad experience.

Working abroad isn't just an easy ticket to traveling 24/7. Hello? It's WORK. You're there to work hard and make a positive impact on local and international organizations. In the process, you're also there to learn – about yourself, about your host culture, about your chosen career path, and about the world at large. You're going to work hard, play hard, and explore far and wide. It won't be easy, but we think you're up to the task. So, ask yourself:

Are you ready to work abroad? What are your first steps? How do you make the most of this experience? How important is knowing the language before you get there? Etc.

The list of questions to ask before preparing to work abroad just gets longer and longer the more you think about it. But, we've already thought about it. In fact, at GoAbroad we've thought about it for 20+ years in the field, and we've learned a thing or two in all that time.

As part of GoAbroad's mission to provide the best and most comprehensive resources for meaningful travelers, our writers share their best first time work abroad tips every step of the way – from finding jobs and the dreaded Skype interview, to finally securing that coveted work visa. They're the experts with real experience and all the best info on how and where to find jobs, the best possible program options for you, how to fund your time abroad, and anything you might need to know. So, now you can go out into the world and really soak it all in!

Interested in joining this initiative? [Partner with us!](#)

OUR CONTRIBUTORS



Mary Ellen Dingley first knew she wanted to travel the world when she was 8 years old, staying up past her bedtime to read stories about international adventures. She has since worked, volunteered, and studied in five different countries, including receiving a Masters from the London School of Economics. She currently works in DC at the intersection of cultural anthropology, international development, and gender equality.



Jennifer Lachs is a writer for Open Colleges, one of Australia's leading online education providers. She is a globetrotting writer, social media manager, and former scientist. Originally from Munich, Germany, she has lived and worked in five countries across the world. After finishing her PhD in chemistry in 2013, she went on a round-the-world trip that is ongoing and has taken her to over 20 countries. Jenny writes about her travels and her quest to become a digital nomad on her blog Square Hippie.



Danielle DeSimone graduated from the University of Mary Washington with degrees in English, creative writing, and Italian. She lived in southern Italy for five years and has so far traveled to fifteen countries, in addition to studying abroad in Bath, England and Bologna, Italy. Next up in her travel plans: Iceland! Danielle is currently the social media manager and assistant editor at the National Italian American Foundation (NIAF), where she gets to combine her loves of writing, Instagram, and pasta.



← This could be you! Want to share your own travel tips and tales? [Give us a shout!](#)



WHY WORK ABROAD? 9 LEGIT REASONS

By Jennifer Lachs

Who knows what crazy shenanigans you'll get into during your after-hours! If you've got the travel bug, you can probably think of a million and one reasons to explore the world. But the number one thing that usually stops people from traveling is a lack of money.

That's why working abroad is such a great way to explore other countries and cultures. You get paid to travel, whilst building your career and enjoying an adventure of a lifetime. However, if you're wondering whether working abroad might be the right move for you, there's much more to consider than earning a living whilst traveling. We've put together this guide of nine reasons to work abroad:

Why working abroad is good—for your wallet, the world, and your career

As you figure out whether working abroad is the right path for you or not, we encourage you to read over these reasons to work abroad and decipher if they align with your goals.

1. Get paid to travel. We repeat: Get paid to travel.

Let's face it, traveling is expensive. Even if you're sticking to a strict budget, long-term travel costs a lot of money. If you've got running costs, like student loan repayments, it can be difficult to go abroad for an extended time without breaking the bank or getting into more debt. That's why working abroad is the perfect opportunity to travel while getting paid. You get to explore a new country while earning a decent income and without sacrificing your career.

2. Learn new skills.

No matter what country you move to, working abroad will undoubtedly lead you to learn new skills. Not only will you get new skills at your new job abroad, but you'll also learn new soft skills, from communication skills to networking. After all, navigating a new city without speaking the language makes you resourceful, and working in an international team will help to improve your communication skills.

3. Personal development.

Moving to a new country to start a new job will undoubtedly push you out of your comfort zone. Nothing helps you grow as a person like interrupting your safe and comfortable routine. Whether you're a serial traveller or this is your first trip abroad, you'll gain new perspectives and learn things about yourself and your home country that you never knew before. This new perspective will help you develop personally just as much as you grow professionally.

4. Master a second language.

Chances are that you'll be moving to a country where you don't speak the language. Consider this a bonus for when you work overseas, as it gives you the unique opportunity to learn a language abroad and practice your new skills with locals. Speaking the language will not only help you better integrate into your new role, but also help you stand out from the crowd in the future.

As yet another layer of icing on the work abroad cake, learning a new language is associated with long-term benefits, like improved memory, improved attention span, and boosted creativity. The advantages of working overseas include a boost to your brain power!

"While you work abroad, you'll be collaborating with locals and expats from other countries—this can expose you to new job opportunities!"

5. Expand your network.

Working abroad is a great way to expand your personal and professional network. While it's already possible to network with people all around the world via online platforms, such as LinkedIn, it's a completely different experience to meeting people in real life. While you work abroad, you'll be collaborating with locals and expats from other countries—this can expose you to new job opportunities (or opportunities in general!). Additionally, you'll be forming friendships with people from different backgrounds, some of which will last a lifetime.

Why work overseas? Advantages include a global circle of people who have your back and can help you get the leg up in future job hunts (we think that's a pretty cool one!).

6. Boost your resumé.

Having an international assignment on your resume could boost your future employability. Talent mobility is a big topic in recruiting, and an increasing number of future jobs will require international travel. Your stint working abroad will prove that you're flexible and independent, and help your resumé stand out from the crowd. Also, any additional skills you gain while abroad, like language skills, will further boost your resumé.

7. Immerse yourself into life abroad.

There's only so much you can learn about a culture on a short vacation. Working abroad will allow you to gain a deeper understanding of a country, its people, and its culture. You won't just be a visitor anymore, but a temporary member of that community. This insider view will give you a different perspective on all aspects of life, including family life and politics.

You'll have the chance to really immerse yourself and learn about unique quirks and traditions from your local friends, which you'd never be exposed to on a vacation.

8. Find your dream career.

Often, the desire to travel comes from a drive to learn more about ourselves. Many people choose to work abroad not only to travel, but also to try out different jobs and new roles. In particular, working holiday visas are a great opportunity to dip your feet into a few new industries. It is very likely that by working abroad you will find new interests and passions, which might lead you on a path to a new career that you wouldn't have discovered otherwise.

9. Earn good money!

That's right, jobs abroad often pay just as well if not better than jobs at home. Depending on the country you select, it's very possible to earn a decent living abroad. Also, with living costs being much lower in many other countries, you might even find you're able to save more than you would at home. This will allow you to travel even more during holidays and possibly between work opportunities.



How can I work abroad?

Just like any big change in life, finding work abroad takes time, dedication, and careful planning. There's more to it than just hopping on a plane and going to a few job interviews. If you're asking yourself "How can I work abroad?" then here are six tasks for you to follow to find your first work abroad opportunity.

Research, research, research.

Before you start applying for random jobs all over the world, you need to sit down and do the necessary research. There are many things to consider before going abroad:

- Where do you want to work?
- How long do you want to stay for?
- Which region or specific country are you interested in?
- What kind of work do you want to do?
- What kind of visas/paperwork will you need?

Answering these questions will help you narrow down the opportunities that interest you. After all, there's a whole wide world out there to explore and you'll need to get specific in order to land your dream job abroad.

Want personalized advice? Our team of [Online Advisors](#) would be DELIGHTED to send you program suggestions based on your preferences.

Spread the word.

Once you've narrowed down your options slightly, it's time for stage 2 of the research phase – putting yourself out there. Make a list of people you know who have spent time abroad, and ask your friends and family whether they know anyone who has worked in the same country you're interested in going to.

Next, get in touch with these people and ask them as many questions as you can. Find out what kind of visa they had, whether they used an agency to help them apply for jobs, which area they lived in, etc. First-hand information is absolutely invaluable when traveling abroad. You might even get a few local contacts that you can quiz further or meet up with once you arrive. It's always great to know someone in a new city.

Make your decision.

Once you've done all your research, have read reviews of work abroad programs, and talked to people who have worked abroad, it's time to decide whether you want to get yourself a working holiday visa, apply for an international position, or use a work abroad placement program. There are many different options, but using a program can save you a lot of headache and planning time.

Working holiday visas can be a great option if you're happy to do backpacker-style jobs. The right program will help you to have a smooth transition and get the most out of your work abroad experience.

Get prepared.

This is the boring, but very important part, so don't skip it as it could get you into trouble in the long run. Like any form of international travel, working abroad comes with its fair share of bureaucracy to deal with. You'll have visa and/or work permit applications, travel insurance, and vaccinations to think about. Don't leave this to the last minute, as many vaccinations require multiple rounds and can take months to complete. Visa applications can also take weeks or months, so make sure you apply in good time.

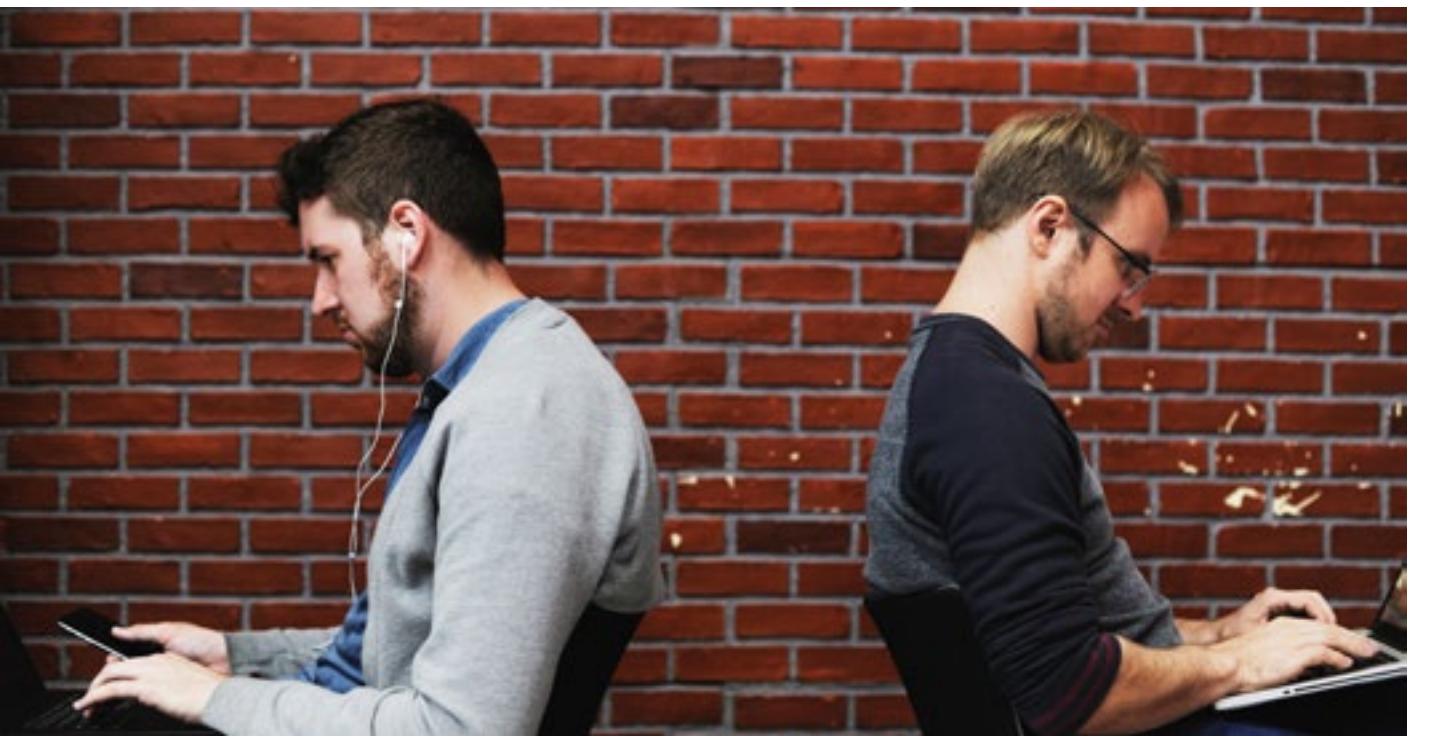
Start learning the local language.

Whether you plan to take a course on arrival, or lessons are included in your work abroad program, think about learning the basics before you leave home. It's time to get a head start on that fluency! ;-)

Even just a simple 'hello, please, and thank you' will make you feel much more comfortable when you arrive. Learning numbers is also a great way to avoid confusion over taxi fares or at the market.

Enjoy yourself!

Last, but not least, don't forget to enjoy yourself. Like any big change in life, moving to a new country, starting a new job, and immersing yourself in a new culture can be exhausting. It's perfectly normal for it to take a little while to settle in. But whenever you get stressed out, try to take a deep breath and remind yourself of the incredible adventure you're embarking on. Just enjoy the journey.



HOW TO CHOOSE BETWEEN WORK ABROAD PROGRAMS

By Jennifer Lachs

You've decided you want to work abroad, broaden your horizons, meet new people, learn new skills, and explore new cultures. Congratulations, a work abroad program is a life-changing experience. Whether you're a recent graduate or taking a break from your career, working abroad is a great choice and an enriching experience. But now that you've made the decision to work overseas, you're faced with a challenge: How to choose between work abroad programs? How to pick a job?

A quick Google search might have already shown you just how many different programs there are to choose from.

Then there are things to consider like language barriers, visa requirements, and foreign bureaucracy. Also, what might be right for one person, may not necessarily be right for you. The dream of working abroad can suddenly feel daunting or even completely overwhelming, especially if this is your first overseas experience.

Thankfully, there are many resources out there that have compiled the best work abroad programs in any field, and any region of the world. **But, before you throw yourself into the search, read the tips below that will help you make the right decision for you.**

Understand your "why?"

There could be many different reasons that you want to work abroad. Exploring a new culture, learning a new language, developing new professional skills, or simply wanting to travel more. And the reasons are different for every single person. That's why it's so important to get really clear on exactly WHY you want to work abroad. It doesn't have to be a life-changing spiritual journey you're seeking, but knowing your "why" will make your decision process much easier.

Once you know why you're taking this step, write down the absolute must-haves for your work abroad experience and think of them as your non-negotiable features. Maybe it's learning Spanish, working with animals, or spending a lot of time outdoors. Knowing your 'why' and your non-negotiables will eliminate a vast amount of options, making researching and choosing the right program much easier and faster.

Pick a destination.

Obviously, picking a destination is the biggest decision you'll have to make. It can be difficult to choose, especially if you've got a serious case of wanderlust and want to explore the whole world. Many factors come into play when picking the right destination, here are a few you should consider:

Personal Preference

Do you love the hustle and bustle of a city or are you more of a country person? Do you prefer hot climates or do you love the snow, mountains or beaches? How far do you want to travel? Maybe you'd prefer to stay closer to home so you can go back for visits, or maybe you want a real adventure. All these personal preferences will help you determine your perfect destination as you figure out how to pick a job abroad.

Language

Do you feel more comfortable working abroad in a country where you already speak the language or would you like to learn a new language while abroad? Do you already have some knowledge of this language or are you starting from scratch? In the latter case, you might consider taking a few language classes before leaving home to make the transition easier.

Visas

Your passport and the length of your stay will play a big role in determining where you can travel for your work abroad experience. As a first step, do a quick Google search of where you might be able to get a working holiday visa. These are often relatively easy to get hold of, but are restricted by age. The cut-off age is usually between 30-35 years. Find out whether your preferred destination has strict visa regulations, it can often take a few months to acquire the right visa. Most work abroad programs will give you all the necessary information about visas and many also help you with the application process, but it's always good to do a little research in advance.

Know the different types of work abroad programs out there.

Besides the destination, picking the right type of job is one of the most crucial decisions.

There are many different experiences to choose from: working holiday visas, teaching, Au Pair jobs, camp leaders, or more traditional corporate jobs are all possible. Which program is right for you will depend on your education, work experience and sense of adventure, but the factors to consider that will help make your choice apply to each program:

Length

How long do you want to be away for and how much time do you have. This can depend on whether you're still a student and only have the summer break, or you have a full year to work abroad.

Support system

How much support do you want and need from your work abroad program? Some programs offer ongoing support while you're abroad, others are a bit more hands off and only help you get started. Get clear on how comfortable you are with overseas travel and how independent a traveler you are.

Costs

Obviously, costs are a big factor. Although you will be earning while working abroad, you should definitely have a cushion saved up to get you started. At the minimum, you'll have to cover the cost of your transportation, the program fees, accommodation and living costs for the first month and travel insurance. Of course, this will largely depend on which region you choose. Thailand will be much more affordable than New Zealand or Japan for example. Make sure you understand all costs involved in a program and what is and is not included in the program fee as you figure out how to pick a job that is right for you—abroad.

The application process

Just like when you pick a job anywhere, a work abroad experience means you'll have to apply and win over an employer. Make sure you understand exactly what is required of you and take this process as seriously as you would any job application at home. When researching programs, find out how much support they offer during the application process.

Use your network.

Chances are you already know somebody in your extended network who has taken part in a work abroad program. Maybe a cousin, an old school friend, or a colleague at work. Get in touch with them and ask if you could pick their brain over a coffee sometime—they'll have great advice on how to pick a job abroad.

Most people love a chance to relive and share their overseas experience, and you will be able to get invaluable first-hand information. Even if you want to go to a different region in the world or work in a different industry, hearing real stories from real people will help you ask the right questions once you're talking to different work abroad programs.

If you don't know anyone with experience personally, do a quick shoutout on social media and ask whether your connections know other people that could help. You'll be surprised how helpful a single Facebook post can be.

Stay organized.

The research phase can be overwhelming due to the sheer amount of different programs out there. You'll be reading a lot of blogs, and emailing or calling a lot of different people. In order to stay organised, it's a great idea to create a simple spreadsheet where you can collect and compare all the different options and factors. Take note of contact email addresses and phone numbers to stay organised, add links to websites, take notes of the reviews you read, cost of the programs, etc. Having everything in one place will make the decision process much more structured and you'll feel in control.

Read work abroad program reviews.

This might sound like a no-brainer, but reading reviews is a crucial part of the selection process. It's easy to get excited when you find a great program in your dream destination and at a great price. But before you book your spot on the program, always make sure you read as many reviews and testimonials by past participants as possible. Reading about other people's experiences will give you a much better understanding of what your job and life will look like if you pick this program.



Thanks to the internet, reviews are incredibly easy to find and you should always do a Google search for the program name + review. Many companies also have Facebook pages where participants can leave reviews.

Consider established programs.

It's also always a good idea to find out how long the program you're interested in has been in business. If you can't find any reviews online this could mean the company is pretty new. It's okay to reach out to them directly and ask to see reviews – any legitimate program will collect real-life testimonials and be happy to share them with you.

Many programs have been around for decades, they have a large support network to help you get started, and have years of experience helping people have the best time abroad.

Talk to alumni.

If you want to go the extra mile to make sure you're picking the perfect program for you, try to get in touch with alumni of this program. Some companies will be happy to put you in touch with former participants, but often you can also contact them via their comments on blogs or reviews on social media. Ask them specific questions. Ask them what they did to prepare and what they wish they'd known before they went abroad.

Always read the fine print.

This is clearly the most boring part of the research process and also one that most people skip. Don't be those people. Always make sure you read the full contract before signing it. That includes the fine print and FAQs. You should look into the cancellation policy, as some programs are stricter than others. Other things to ask about include: who is your contact partner, what exactly is included, and what extra costs are involved, and what to do in case of an emergency. It's not exciting, but it's necessary, and you'll be much better off being safe than sorry.

Trust your gut and don't rush.

And last but not least, always listen to your gut feeling – it's often right. If you have a nagging doubt or feeling a program might not be the right fit for you, then trust that. Your instinct is usually right. Equally, don't rush into the big decision. Especially when you've done a huge amount of research, it can feel like you just want to get this process over with and get on a plane to start your adventure.

But wouldn't it be sad if you'd spent all that time researching the right program and then rushed into a decision just because you ran out of patience? It's important that you allow yourself to take the time to process all the information you've consumed during your research phase. Never let yourself be pressured into making last-minute decisions. If the decision feels rushed, it probably is, so make choices at a pace that feels comfortable to you.



HOW TO GET A JOB OVERSEAS WITH NO EXPERIENCE

By Danielle DeSimone

Once you catch the travel bug, it can be hard to squash. Although honestly – who would want to? After getting a taste of the freedom, excitement, and personal growth that being abroad can give you, you'll always be trying to find a way back to the other side of the world. That's why getting a job abroad can be such an enticing option for would-be world travelers!

However, going to work overseas for a year+ isn't for the faint of heart, especially if you're a recent grad without a lot of experience in the working world. The application process is a long and grueling, and sometimes discouraging, process. But – you know you're right for the job and we know you're right for the job, and with all the skills travel can teach you, you'll be a seasoned pro in no time!

1. Redefine "experience."

To a graduate or soon-to-be-grad, the 'real world' (whatever THAT means) can seem intimidating, especially when applying for a Big-Kid-Job. You'll find yourself constantly wondering: How do I get job experience without already having some? Good news! "Experience" is a loose term. You don't have to have a star-studded resume of your past three jobs on Wall Street as a twenty-two year-old to claim that you have "experience."

You can also be qualified for a job through your experience volunteering (this shows your passion for specific causes and bettering the world), participating in campus organizations (things like student government equip you with time, event, and people-management skills), and – of course – your summer/semester studying abroad (intercultural understanding! A global perspective! Language fluency!). It's a safe bet that a lot of your activities throughout your years at college – both inside and outside the classroom – have prepared you for the working world. The important thing is how you spin it and present it to potential employers!

2. Think outside the box.

Never, ever, ever, EVER lie on your resume. NEVER. Not only is it unprofessional and dishonest, you will also probably get caught in the lie. However, snagging job opportunities abroad without experience is all about pushing the boundaries a little when selling yourself as a qualified candidate. Maybe your passion for cooking shows the ability to think on your feet! Or perhaps your crafting club demonstrates a keen eye for detail and a sense of creativity. Volunteering at the animal shelter is definitely an example of how you're not afraid to dig in and get your hands dirty (literally) when it comes to hard work.

"When applying for jobs abroad, be sure to really highlight how your activities in college apply to the role & responsibilities of the job you're applying for."

You'd be surprised by how many skills you've gained from your daily life and activities – even the fun ones! – that can then be used in your search for work abroad without experience! As an international applicant you'll already stand out in the application pool, but showing off a little pizzazz and giving your employers a better sense of who you are as a person and an employee will really distinguish you from the rest.

Want the rest of our tips for how to get a job overseas with (little) to no experience???

[**KEEP READING HERE!**](#)



10 WORK ABROAD PROGRAMS YOU'LL LOVE

By the GoAbroad Writing Team

If you find yourself lamenting the bygone days of youthful global gallivanting or feeling one foot deeper in the grave with every passing work day, you might be in for a change of scenery and a massive dose of adventure. Due to visa restrictions, language barriers, and the forthright daunting idea of completely uprooting and relocating somewhere else, finding programs to work abroad may seem like a near impossible dream that only drifting hippies and corporate big shots are capable of.

However, a little known secret are the heaps of resources for finding work abroad programs that will get people legal, paid, and working all in the same easy bundle. Landing that dream international job, especially straight out of college with limited experience, can be incredibly overwhelming.

Programs to work abroad will do all the legwork for you, so that you can avoid the messy red tape and acrobatics just to land an interview at an unreliable company. Having a support staff and connections to trustworthy employers is never a bad springboard to have as you plunge into the unknown abroad.

Rejuvenate your routine and rediscover your sense of childlike wonder in everyday life by experiencing life in a new country. We can't lead you to the fountain of youth, but you'll undoubtedly be off your rocker for these 10 programs to work abroad that we can't get enough of.

1. Working holiday in New Zealand

Working and traveling with [InterExchange](#) in New Zealand gives participants the freedom to experience the best the country has to offer for up to a year while taking on short-term jobs.

InterExchange offers participants access to job boards, a job referral service, an orientation session, plus additional in-country services in Auckland. This is a self-driven program with support in the background: you choose where to travel and work! What are you waiting for, go-getters?!

2. Teach English in Thailand

POPULAR LIFE PLAN ALERT!

A job teaching English in Thailand is a fantastic way to live overseas and get paid to travel the world. No wonder everyone is lining up to do it. Armed with an International TEFL Academy TEFL/TESOL certification from [International TEFL Academy](#), you will be able to work abroad teaching English while getting paid. After taking your TEFL course, you can kickstart your teaching career in major cities across Thailand, Asia and around the world.

3. Au Pair in Germany

Do kids love you? Do you love kids? Then au pairing in Germany with [GeoVisions](#) is exactly what you're looking for.

You're a (well-paid...and well-fed) babysitter/older sibling/mentor/tutor/best friend. You take care of your host children and in return, your host family will provide a private room, meals, and all the support needed. Plus, you get to stay in a beautiful location. Can you say: win-win?

4. Tourism & hospitality in Spain

With [Instituto Hemingway](#), you'll get work placement in a top restaurant/hotel in Spain. From Alicante to Toledo, and everywhere in between, your ideal job for the best balance of work and play is just a click away.

With accommodation, meals, and a little extra cash to stash or spend, you'll be able to live comfortably working in Spain. Better start brushing up on your Spanish!

5. Marketing & business in China

Landing a dream job in marketing is easier than you think it is. [Topview International Education](#) helps you navigate the Chinese job market to place you with organizations in Beijing or Shanghai. You'll be rocking hot pot and dumplings for lunch in no time!

If you're a driven, qualified professional, there's definitely a job waiting for you in China. What are you waiting for?

6. Camp counselor in Italy

Spend your summer working at a summer camp in Italy! We repeat: IN. ITALY. This unique program with [GeoVisions](#) allows you to travel around Italy and explore the country and culture in depth on the weekends, making the most of your free time. You work Monday thru Friday tutoring English to an Italian summer camp and provide a fun and creative learning environment.

This is a great program for people who want to experience life in Italy and the Italian culture in-depth.

7. Work in Australia

[BUNAC's Work Australia program](#) offers you the opportunity of a lifetime. With a working holiday visa sponsored by the Australian Government to allow young Americans (aged 18-30) to work in country for up to 12 months.

Australia, one of the largest and most beautiful countries in the world, is a traveler's paradise. This visa allows you to work for one employer, or hop around during your year abroad. There is plenty of short-term work available and many employers prefer international workers for such positions. Whether you're looking for a job in an office, or more time spent in the great outdoors, this program in Oz is the way to go.

8. Kick off post-grad life in Ireland

For recent graduates looking to discover all the beauty of the Emerald Isle while adding a little more experience to their resume, a [working holiday with Stint Ireland](#) is the answer. The Irish working holiday visa allows citizens from Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, Hong Kpng, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and the USA to live and work in Ireland for 1 to 2 years.

And Stint has got your back every step of the way. From the initial visa application, medical and travel insurance, and arrival logistics to setting you up with a lovely home and community of like-minded recent grads and Stinters in Dublin.

9. Get certified & teach in Costa Rica

Teaching English abroad is the ideal job for anyone just out of college and looking to make money and travel. [Maximo Nivel](#) in Costa Rica offers a fun, intensive, internationally accredited TEFL/TESOL Certification program. The TEFL program is 4 weeks/150 hours long, including 15+ hours of practical English teaching and observation of experienced teachers. Then you'll get right into the classroom in Costa Rica—a serious market for ESL teachers.



10. Teaching in South Korea

To stay on the teaching-train. South Korea is fast becoming one of the most popular destinations to teach in the world, and rightly so! [TravelBud](#) offers teaching positions throughout the year all over South Korea. You can look forward to 24/7 in-country support while in South Korea, up to \$2,300 per month, free accommodation and flights, end-of-contract severance pay, and so much more. Honestly, what are you still doing here?

THE POTENTIAL LONELINESS OF WORKING ABROAD THAT NO ONE EVER TALKS ABOUT

By Mary Ellen Dingley

One of the saddest times of my life was when I was living in the beautiful, sunny Dominican Republic. I was 10 minutes from the beach, I had all the fresh fruit and vegetables and margaritas I could want, and I was miserable.

I had taken a job teaching in the Dominican Republic to gain international work experience and to improve my Spanish. It was my third time living abroad and my second time working abroad.

I thought I was ready for anything, but instead I found myself spending long afternoons in my bed, holding back tears. And what was even worse? It felt like I wasn't allowed to be sad. To others, I was on some sort of extended vacation and I should be elated to be where I was.

When we travel abroad we often get pressured into pretending to love and gush over everywhere we go and everything we see. Everything has to be "breathtaking," "beautiful," and "rich in something or whatever," but sometimes working abroad is sad and lonely and hard. We should be able to talk about that. There are challenges to living and working abroad and we need to be open to discussing them. Emotional intelligence and mental health is important for us all!

I love the quote "Wherever you go, there you are," which has been attributed to many people as far back as Confucius, and more recently to author Jon Kabat-Zinn. When we travel and when we work abroad we do not outrun ourselves, and we certainly do not outrun real life. We carry it with us. Many people, especially Americans, seem to think international travel is always a "break" from real life, always a vacation. However, **being abroad doesn't mean real life stops, or everything is perfect, or that we are suddenly happy all the time.**

Reading travel articles and books might make you feel otherwise though, and comparing yourself on social media to your traveling friends makes you feel like you must be doing something wrong. You're not. Life can be hard, both at home and abroad, but that doesn't mean we are doing anything wrong.

Sometimes, we just don't jive with a place, and that's alright. This is me giving you permission to dislike somewhere, even if you were so excited to go work there. Give everywhere a chance, obviously, but don't feel like you have to swoon over a city you only find "ok." I never felt at home in London, while other people love the city! I loved New Orleans, while some of my friends just were not feeling the vibe.

Sometimes, no matter how beautiful somewhere is, our real life there will be difficult. When I was teaching in the DR I found my job challenging and exhausting. I had no friends yet and felt very alone.

"A new place will not necessarily "fix" you or your life. It will simply shift it. It might solve some problems, but create other challenges."

I had studied Spanish in Peru and found it hard to understand the Dominican style of speaking. I was carrying with me the end of a romantic relationship and doubts about my future career. I felt a heavy sadness every day that the sunshine and beauty of the beaches could not lift. And that's ok. It was ok for me to realize I was sad and why, and to let myself feel that way. Not all of life is some sort of Eat, Pray, Love or Under the Tuscan Sun story.

Eventually, after I stuck it out a month in the DR, things improved, my job duties shifted, I met some people, Spanish became easier and life looked up. Even still, I will always think back to my time in the Dominican Republic with bittersweetness. It was a challenging time, but I learned so much about myself.

Just because you're not IN LOVE with a place doesn't mean the experience won't still be meaningful and shape you in certain ways. In fact, maybe those difficulties and the disconnect between you and the place is what does the trick. **It teaches you a serious lesson in resilience** and making the most of what you're dealt.

Being in a place you don't love can also help you to notice things you might not if you were head-over-heels. In the DR I noticed the inequality, how horribly some of the tourists treated the locals, and a political system that was geared against people of different backgrounds.

I learned a lot about the interaction between wealthy Western tourists and a tourism-based economy. I also learned to be really careful about washing your food, because you might get parasites (not a fun lesson to learn).

When you notice these things, or when you get sick, or when life is just crummy and sad, let yourself feel that. Even if it's a beautiful sunny day and you "should" be at the beach. If you need to sit in bed at home and binge-watch your favorite show from back home on Netflix, do that. Do what you need to do. Don't stagnate, but give yourself a break. Allow space to feel and rest when you are having a bad day.

This is my call to action that we let ourselves be honest about how we are doing, even when we are abroad. Especially when we are abroad, perhaps. If you set off on a grand adventure to work in an exciting foreign country, and now you're two weeks in and crying into your last box of snacks you brought from home, that is ok. You are not broken. You are not a coward. You are a normal human with normal feelings in reaction to the challenges of working abroad.

Find someone who lets you be honest about this. Don't spend any time comparing yourself on social media. Put down the travel books that make you feel like you aren't measuring up. Working abroad can be hard and that doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. In fact, it might mean you're doing it exactly right. It might mean that you truly care about your work abroad and you're invested in it, and that makes the challenges just feel that much harder. You are sad and lonely right now, but that doesn't mean your whole life will be sad and lonely.



Working abroad is an amazing opportunity. Sometimes it's smooth sailing, and sometimes it's choppy waters. I do not regret any of the times I have studied, volunteered, or worked abroad. I learned what I want to do in life because of my work abroad. I grew in terms of my career, my studies, and my spirit.

If working abroad is something you want to do, go for it! By all means, take that job, buy that plane ticket, go on that adventure. And always, let yourself feel whatever you feel.



5 ROOKIE MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN WORKING ABROAD FOR THE FIRST TIME

By Mary Ellen Dingley

Working abroad is a great way to gain a career edge in this globalizing economy; of course, it's also a great way to grow as a person (and to travel!). But after getting notification that you're hired for your first international job, you can't rest on your laurels—now you need to prepare for the transition into a new work culture. What is professional behavior in one office could be considered too casual in another (or perhaps worse, too formal and aloof!).

I once transitioned from a very formal office to a culture that was more casual, and was sat down by a colleague who told me I was coming across as "standoffish." And she was right! She quickly taught me a few pointers of how to best conduct myself in this new environment, and it improved my ability to get things done.

Of course, alongside the cultural differences, there are the usual challenges of learning the ropes in a new organization. This can be true whether you're taking an entry level corporate job, teaching abroad, or finding yourself in some other exciting line of work (cruise ships?!). Heed our work abroad advice: make it easier on yourself, and your new colleagues, and avoid these rookie mistakes!

1. Not researching

If you show up without knowing the basics of business etiquette or cultural norms, it's going to make things awkward. We all make mistakes when we move abroad and your co-workers should understand that, but knowing basic things like how to greet people professionally, how timing and scheduling works, what titles to call colleagues, etc will make the transition much smoother. Don't get caught off guard by someone else's hand shake or bow, and be ready to know when to show up for meetings!

Whether you are heading to work in Thailand or to the beaches of Brazil, read up on the culture, or better yet, get in touch with someone who lived there. Most working abroad programs have reviews from participants, and that's a great place to start for some insider information.

And outside of cultural differences, there are things to consider like driving laws, taxes, when to pay rent, or being prepared for the price of living. If you are going with a program, much of that may be taken care of for you, but if not, keep in mind all of the "little things" that can be different. Doing your research will help lessen the discomfort of the move and shows that you respect your host country and your new colleagues. There might still be a few bad days those first few weeks, but you will be more prepared for them.

2. Making assumptions

If you aren't careful in your research, you could absorb stereotypes about your new host country, and then find yourself sailing into your new job with preconceived notions and a lot of assumptions. This can lead to misunderstandings, bad judgement calls, and a mind closed to learning because you think you already know everything there is to know. Like the time in the Dominican Republic when I assumed I fully understood local classroom rules and embarrassed myself by not asking for extra training early on!

After researching on your own, make sure you arrive with an open mind. The research will be vital to create a base level understanding, but it cannot replace learning while on the ground. Ask questions of your local colleagues! Take them out to coffee and pick their brain. Or not coffee if they don't drink coffee—tea? Ice cream? Whatever sort of treat! They will likely appreciate that you want to learn and that you recognize they have wisdom and knowledge to share.

3. Over-committing

When starting a new job you want to make a good impression, but you need to know your limits and only commit to projects you can succeed with. Roadblocks you don't expect could pop up as you run into cultural or language differences you aren't used to, so projects that might be easy in your home country could take longer in your new location. Can you get a spreadsheet done in 20 minutes back home? Cool, but in your new place you might need to look up spellings or be trained on the organization's style guidelines. Or maybe the internet connection won't be strong enough to load your awesome data set quickly (or consistently). Your 20 minute spreadsheet could take a few hours (yikes, make sure to hit that "Save" button just in case!).

When you are busy settling into an entirely new country and culture, and trying not to get lost, you don't want to also be swamped with too many commitments! That could send stress levels through the roof. So be careful not to bite off more than you can chew early on. Your boss and colleagues will understand that you are busy transitioning.

4. Make sure not to close yourself off

A new job, new country, and new culture can be overwhelming, and for many of us the tendency is to spend a lot of time alone, soaking it in. We might find ourselves exhausted because of all the newness or from culture shock. Maybe after a long day we just want to Skype our family or sit at home with a good book. This is understandable, and some days it's exactly what we need, but make sure you are still being friendly with your co-workers. Especially in certain cultures, turning down invitations can be seen as rude. Make sure you are friendly and pleasant to your colleagues, even when you are feeling overwhelmed.

If you simply can't make it out, explain to them that you are tired. Practice self-care and alone time, and don't push yourself too hard, but balance that with making connections. It can be tough your first time working abroad to balance it all, but it will make the rest of your time there much more pleasant if you jump in ready to build good relationships!

5. Trying to do it your way

You were hired because you have the skills and knowledge your new workplace needs, and they want you to bring that to the table. But don't try to come in and make changes or push your weight around during your first few weeks!! While you might see problems you can fix, realize that you probably aren't seeing the big picture yet (not to mention you could just come across as arrogant!). So ask questions, gather information, and observe. Get a sense of what is happening in the background and why. Remain humble throughout—humility will take you far. See which colleagues are open to suggestions, and which might be more sensitive.

After you feel that you fully understand the inner workings, ask one of your more approachable colleagues or supervisor for time to chat and lay out your ideas. The beginning is the time to learn and listen, to get your thinking cap on, and soak in all the information.

Now become their best hire!

It may seem scary to move abroad for work, but the advantages are many! Realize that there will be challenges, and the initial transition can be tough. Research as much as you can to lessen the shocks of transition. If you are going with a program, request to speak to someone who has made the transition before you. Cut yourself some slack those first few weeks - you're going through a lot of change. But any challenges pale in the face of the great ways international work can help you grow. So, prepare yourself well for your first week and jump into your new adventure!



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