



## A WORD FROM RELOCATION SPECIALISTS

Welcome to our final edition of Relocation Topics for 2007.

The changes within our organisation this year have been well received by our clients and colleagues and we look forward to continuing to bring first class service to you all in 2008.

The theme this issue focuses around the other family members who are moving. We are continuing our series of personal experiences of people who have relocated and what tips they have picked up on the way to make life interesting and fun during this often challenging time. We talk with Harriette Russell - van Mullekom who moved to Dubai from Melbourne in August 2006. Harriette has moved several times so offers great insight. Monita follows this with an article of being a "trailing partner" and some ways to feel in control of the move when you are outside the work environment. Aysegul of our Brisbane office writes the final article of creating networks for newcomers, no matter where you live.

We wish you all an enjoyable summer and as always if anyone has any topics they would like to see included or comments about these articles please contact me directly.

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## FEATURES

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- **Living in Dubai: An Interview**
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- **Networking to Settle into a New Location: The Brisbane Experience**

### Quote of the month

*Why are all of the foreign women here so miserable?" a friend of mine once asked as we sipped coffee in a local cafe and compared our experiences in our new country.*

*"It's because," I responded after giving her question some thought, "the men come here with a purpose. Sure they run into problems and have their share of frustrations, but at least they have a final goal in sight. And it's their own goal. The women, on the other hand, come because their mates do. Most of them previously worked outside the home, but here there aren't any jobs, so they can't. There aren't even places where they can take classes or grow their own garden. There's simply no outlet for them to derive a sense of satisfaction or accomplishment. Then, on top of that, they have to deal with adapting to a new culture which views the role of women a bit differently than their home countries and the frustrations of those around them."*

**What's a Trailing Partner To Do? 7 Pieces of Advice That Might Help by Tracy Bowens (2002)**

## RELOCATION TOPICS



### LIVING IN DUBAI: An Interview

**Interviewee:**  
**Harriette Russell - Van Mullekom**  
(pictured with daughter Hannah)

**Editor: Monita Mascitti-Meuter**

As part of a new series in our newsletter, we are now regularly interviewing expats to get a snapshot of the practical issues surrounding a secondment. We invited Harriette Russell-van Mullekom (originally from the Netherlands but officially residing in Melbourne) who recently moved to **Dubai** to tell us of her experience. Harriette has traveled extensively, especially through Europe and also lived in Sydney, Indonesia and Hong Kong. This is her fifth relocation. Because of her husband's work commitments, Harriette moved to Dubai in August 2006 for an indefinite period of time with her three daughters now aged 10, 8 and 6.

#### BEFORE THE MOVE:

#### What did you know about your new location and how did you obtain this information?

My sister had lived in Dubai. Since we are a very close family, my husband and I had visited Dubai quite a few times during the 3 years she was there.

#### What excited you about the move?

I was looking forward moving to this exotic location, to finding a nice house for us, exploring the surroundings (e.g. where the nearest shopping centres are), meeting new people, making new friends, trying to learn some Arabic and being able to visit the Netherlands more often, as it is only a 6 hour flight from Dubai.

#### What concerned you about the move?

There were not many concerns about our move. My husband and I had decided that we would return to Australia if either of us was not happy here or unable to settle. My only worry was regarding the children.

#### What three things made the move easier for the children?

1. The children started their new school within 3 days of arriving here, which was good because it kept them occupied and gave them social contact with other children, many of whom were in a similar situation. They also had just arrived and wanted to make new friends.
2. The girls attend the Australian International School, which teaches the Australian curriculum by Australian teachers. This creates familiarity.
3. Being with their family and having each other. All three girls attend the same school and see each other during the day. We are living this experience together and can talk about things with each other.

#### LIVING IN DUBAI

#### What was the greatest adjustment?

The sand that gets everywhere and living for 6 months of the year with the air-conditioning on 24/7.

#### Do you think you experienced any culture shock?

Yes, only slightly though. Getting used to seeing many women covered in abaya's of varying types. Some have just covered their hair, others have only their eyes showing, while others again have a thin black veil covering their entire face. During Ramadan it is not permitted to eat or drink during daylight hours for approximately 1 month. The children found it quite difficult to follow this in public, especially when it is very hot and they are thirsty. The dress code also changes slightly during this holy month. Even though the weather is still very hot, you cannot wear any "revealing" clothing during this time either.

The many labourers we see here at all the building sites. They come mainly from Pakistan and India and work 12 hour days in the hot sun for AUD 8 per day. Moving here I did not expect to see so many of them living under these conditions.

The local children here stay up until all hours. Their usual bedtime is around midnight,

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## LIVING IN DUBAI: An Interview, cont'd

and they start school again the following morning at 8am. Many expatriate teachers complain about the children falling asleep at school or yawning constantly. It is not uncommon to still see them at shopping centres with their parents at 11 pm.

### **If you had to relocate to Dubai again, what would you do differently the second time around?**

I would do nothing differently if I had to go through this experience again.

### **How different is it to get around in Dubai compared to Melbourne?**

It is quite similar to get around here once you get used to the Dubai drivers. Everything is located within easy driving distance. There is a lot of traffic congestion though, but these are mainly during peak hours. There is a street directory, but because of the construction in this city, roads change weekly.

There is a public transport bus service that operates, but it is very unreliable, and mainly used by domestic workers (because it is very cheap- 30cents per trip). A metro system is under construction and should start operating sometime next year. Dubai is not that large, and the roads are magnificent. In most places there are 6 or 7 lane highways.

### **Have you had any issues with the dress code or language barriers etc.?**

Dubai has a very liberal dress code. I can wear what I wore back in summer in Melbourne. You can go to the beach and wear a 2 piece swimming costume. The only time you need to dress more conservatively is during Ramadan or when you visit Sharjah, another nearby Emirate (the UAE is made up of 7 emirates) where the children attend school.

The language has not posed a problem, as nearly everyone speaks English.

### **How did you go about establishing a network/social contacts?**

We met people mainly through the children's school, which is attended by many Australian families. We spend most weekends with them and I have made friends with some other women, that I sometimes meet for coffee, shopping or a visit to the beach or pool during the week.

We have met some people through my husband's work and regularly meet with our neighbours, engineers from Turkey on one side and some local Emirati's on the other side for a halal BBQ and a social drink.

### **What do you feel is the most positive outcome of this experience so far?**

Our family's happiness. The children learn and grow from this and we can experience things here we couldn't have done back home.

### **What do you miss about Australia/Melbourne the most?**

I miss my friends the most. Dropping into someone's house for a coffee and a chat.

### **What do you miss the least?**

Having to pay income tax.

### **What do you think you will miss the most if and when you leave Dubai?**

The new friends we have made. (Being able to hang washing out on the line and having it dry in less than 20 minutes!)



Harriette and her family on Saadiyat (Happiness) island, UAE

## RELOCATION TOPICS



### Easing the Plight of the Trailing Partner

Written by Monita Mascitti-Meuter, Cultural Trainer

One of the most positive and inspiring points that came out of the previous interview with Harriette Russell-van Mullekom about her experience in relocating to Dubai is her approach in successfully settling herself and her family into a culture so diverse to her own. Of course her previous expatriate experience played a pivotal role in her tactics, but it is also her attitude towards difference as well as her attitude towards the secondment itself that is facilitating her ability to make her experience such a positive one.

Being the trailing partner (an awful term, because it almost seems to imply inaction or lack of direction.... someone being dragged along against their will) has its challenges. Whilst the relocating partner will have support networks built in through his/her new position, the trailing partner is often left to fend for themselves. Yet in the end, it is their ability to keep all the needs of the family in balance which will determine the successful outcome of the international assignment.

Whether or not you decide to work or not in this new place, or whether this environment is culturally very diverse to your own or not, the following few steps may make the secondment more manageable and will allow you to regain some control in this relocation.

#### Determine your Main Goal

Once you decide to go along, you need to have a clear picture in your head why you will be making certain sacrifices along the way. Is it to give your partner a chance to advance their career, enhance your children's life experience, explore areas of the globe you always wanted to explore?

#### Do your Homework

You can't do too much research into this new phase of your life. The more prepared you are, the better you will be able to cope with change. Talking to people who have been there, exploring the internet and 'look-see' trips are all vital.

#### Communicate

Keeping the communication lines open is pivotal: as soon as one of the partners has issues, these need to be resolved. If it is not working out for one, and issues are ignored, the option of returning home will quickly come on the table, and everyone ends up losing something precious along the way.

#### Keep an Open Mind

The more you keep thinking it's an us and them situation, the longer it will take to settle in quickly. Especially when situated in cultures very different to your own, the simple act of accommodating to cultural norms of dress and observing unfamiliar religious celebrations and rites with respect, will not only enhance your cross cultural experience but facilitate a shorter adjustment period for everyone.

#### Be Realistic

I have met too many partners who were very negative about the move. This was especially the case in those circumstances where careers had to be put on hold for the sake of the relocation. Treat the secondment as an opportunity to try something different rather than a 2 to 5 year sentence. The important thing is to keep your options open.

#### Keep a Sense of Humour

Getting frustrated with the cultural differences once in a while? It's to be expected. Don't let it get to you. Keeping a sense of humour and keeping situations light makes the difficult days so much easier for everyone.

#### Plan Activities

Planning regular and special outings for all members of the family allows for a way to get accustomed to new surroundings, reconnect as a family unit, and quickly integrate into a sense of routine, which in the end, eases everyone into a level of comfort and acceptance of their new surroundings.

#### Claim Independence

Being independent on some level allows for greater confidence and increases your ability to get around and increases your level of understanding and appreciation of your surroundings. Sometimes the minor detail of not having your own car or venturing into your new surroundings by yourself can significantly reduce how happy and settled you feel in your new environment.

## RELOCATION TOPICS



### Networking to Settle Into a New Location: The Brisbane Experience

Written by Aysegul Kayahan,  
Principal, Brisbane

For those of us that have moved many times, the transition between saying “I have arrived” to “I have settled and I feel like this is home” can be the most difficult and time consuming. Most of the time, our perception of the task (settling into a new community) can make all the difference: the process itself can be a very enjoyable opportunity to stretch our personal boundaries.

Part of the settling in process is re-establishing a new network of services, facilities and friends. The first two are relatively easy. The last--making new friends--takes a great deal of time and effort. While making regular phone calls and sending emails to your previous “home” or your “home of birth” are to be encouraged, they can’t be a substitute for avoiding the task of making new friends.

The relocating employee usually has the least difficulty as they network through work. Families with primary school age children usually find plenty of networking opportunities through the school community while volunteering to help in class or school activities or through organising play dates for their children. The group that has to try the hardest, are partners of relocating employees who do not work outside the home with no young or school aged children at home.

As a result of personal experience and because it has been so successful over the years, we at Relocation Specialists in Brisbane organise a meeting at a park or a coffee shop once a month for recently relocated families. In the early years we tended to move families with young children so the parks were very popular but as the relocation market has changed we find we move such a variety of people in different stages of their lives and so the cafes have been included. It is an opportunity to meet with people going through the same process, to share the funny and sad experiences and hopefully to make new friends. It also gives me, as the relocating agent, an opportunity to meet people I have been communicating with for weeks or months over the phone or via email and see how they are making the transition to living in Brisbane.

One of the main reasons I encourage people to attend these gatherings is because the first four to six weeks after arrival are usually so busy that people don’t have time to brood about having to make friends. Everything is still exciting and there is so much to do. It is actually after all the logistical issues have been covered that time seems to stand still and you realise you need to get to know your community and make some friends. For most of us, this is not easy to do. Sorting out doctors, dentists, gym membership and other classes are important tasks that help create your support networks and are opportunities for new friendships but you also need to be able to talk to other people about what you are going through and when meeting new friends through one of our gatherings you have the potential to explore your new location with a friend who has the same need.

**If you want to find out more about the times and places of these meetings in Brisbane, please contact Aysegul Kayahan by email**  
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