



E-notes from cultureCrossing _ September 2006

cultureCrossing sends out E-notes every 3 months on news, events and books on the subject of global mobility covering issues within cross-cultural training and education, international relocation and intercultural competencies. The focus is on North America and Scandinavia. Feel free to circulate these E-notes to colleagues and business partners - knowledge and information is meant to be shared ;-)

_ NEWS & PROJECTS

- **Book project on relocating with children and offering them a global upbringing.** Family Director, Lena Lauridsen and Cross-Cultural Trainer, Line Mørkbak/cultureCrossing have joined forces in a new book project with the Danish working title 'Danske Verdensbørn' ('Worldly Danish Upbringing'). On the subject of relocating with children the book is written for Danish families on international assignments and families with double cultural backgrounds who are moving to their "other home country". Both writers are living outside their native country Denmark - respectively in Slovakia and the US - with their family and children.

The aim of the book is to guide parents in the difficult job of helping kids adjust in a new and foreign culture. Different geographic areas will be described in terms of local customs, religion, role models, academic standards, social norms and other areas of a child's everyday life. The writers own experiences are enriched and magnified through a series of interviews with Danish parents living abroad, Danes attending international and local schools, and Danish mothers who have experienced giving birth and practicing parenthood as new mothers in cultures far away from their own.

'Danske Verdensbørn' is planned to be in print and ready for distribution in 2007. Read [presentation of writers, Introduction and Chapter list](#) (in Danish only).

- **Survey on Trailing Spouses** conducted by consultant, writer and PhD Candidate Yvonne McNulty.
'The 2005 Trailing Spouse Survey' is from the perspective of the trailing spouse and explores the non-work/family issues associated with deploying international assignees. The survey is intended to provide practitioners, assignees and trailing spouses with useful information to assist them in making informed decisions about their international assignments. Read [article by Yvonne McNulty](#) (or at the end of the E-notes) on the essential finding of the survey.

_ BOOK REVIEW

- **'The Eagle's Shadow: Why America Fascinates and Infuriates the World'** (in Danish 'Forklaring på Amerika') by US journalist Mark Hertsgaard.
Hertsgaard has collected a bouquet of impressions of the US from citizens around the world. The result is an informative piece of US history and an underlining message of the need for cross-cultural understanding and respect.



Herstgaard was on the end of a world tour visiting 15 different countries when 9-11 happened in New York. The terror attacks on American civilians make the book's overall question: "How can the American obligingness and democratic values co-exist with an obviously ignorance and seemingly arrogance towards the rest of the world?" even more pressing. Hertsgaard delivers a critical and very personal text which in many opinions makes 'The Eagle's Shadow' a political book. But that notion doesn't deny the fact that his book is a different and welcoming input for foreigners' introduction to US culture and the many paradoxes in the American society today.

The book is ambitiously trying to juggle both a domestic goal of reeducating the American public on its own history and foreign politics and at the same time giving non-Americans a fuller picture of the reasons behind the many contradictions in "The American Way". Hertsgaard comes out fairly successful from this endeavor and the many translations of his book prove that readers outside of the US are ready for his input. It's a fairly easy read and Hertsgaard has the tendency of repeating his points, but overall 'The Eagle's Shadow' is a recommendable book for an intellectual challenging view on American culture.

EVENTS

- **'Hjem til Danmark'** ('Home to Denmark'), Copenhagen – Denmark, Sep 14 2206. The first of a series of networking event – in collaboration with **Living Institute** - for Danes returning home to their native country after several years abroad. The issue of reverse culture chock is one of the topics.
- **Global Workforce Symposium**, Dallas, Texas - USA, Oct 11-13 2006. The focus of the Symposium is: international assignment management, U.S. domestic mobility polices, and professional development sessions.
- **Danish-American Business Summit**, Atlanta – USA, Oct 27 2206. This year's summit will address the challenges in creating successful companies by combining the best in Danish and American business cultures.
- **SIETAR Conference**, Albuquerque, New Mexico - USA, Nov 1-4 2006. The conference wants to "inspire interculturalists to explore new solutions, new ways of thinking and new ways of taking action in a world where the many facets of diversity are encountered each day. In intercultural research, methods, and concepts, are we ahead of the curve or behind the times? How successfully do we connect with those outside the intercultural field and what unique and essential contributions do we have to offer?"

USEFUL LINKS

- **Test your intercultural skills.** The UK based cross-cultural company Global Excellence has an interesting series of online questionnaires to test ones intercultural skills.
- **Country Insights.** Centre for Intercultural Learning – part of Canadian Institute of Foreign Affairs – has a fantastic useful online overview of history, politics and series of cultural topics for every country in the world.



WHAT TRAILING SPOUSES WANT - AND EXPECT - FROM HUMAN RESOURCES

By Yvonne McNulty, www.thetrailingspouse.com.

To get a perspective on major issues of concern to expatriate spouses and partners, "*The 2005 Trailing Spouse Survey*," conducted by Yvonne McNulty, spanned four years of research in which 264 participants were queried. (See Below, "Profile of the Typical Trailing Spouse.") Among the many significant concerns raised were the following: the role of human resources and importance of any support given to the family, the need to recognize work-life balance (particularly for new arrivals), and the ongoing issue of dual-career situations. Here is a sample of what the respondents had to say.

It's Not Just About Policy

When asked about the support they expect from HR with regards to the international assignment, the following items vied for first place – e-mail and internet access, finding and/or subsidizing accommodations, and organizational assistance in the host location, followed by:

- * Ongoing assistance after a relocation
- * Company funding for home-country visits
- * Outsourcing the relocation program to external vendors
- * Pre-departure training for the trailing spouse

Expectations don't always match reality: Only one tenth of responding spouses rated the level of HR assistance they received as "excellent," and 19 percent as "very good"; one third were satisfied. In a broad range of areas, the participants expressed dissatisfaction, ranging from policy flexibility to language training and reimbursement.

A key concern of trailing spouses regarding HR staff with whom they interact is their personal experience (or lack of experience) in having lived and worked in a foreign country. "There needs to be a greater appreciation of what is left behind (missed opportunities) and what is hoped for as a result of the relocation in the future (potential for new opportunities)," to quote one respondent. "This obviously requires that the staff assisting with the relocation at home and abroad is well versed in such issues and of a mature enough age to understand the 'bigger picture' expectations associated with moving."

But more than hands-on experience is necessary. "There has to be some notion that HR or the home office 'cares' about your 'sacrifice' in so many ways (being away from family during holidays, not really being part of the company team, etc.)." After all, "If the company is responsive and shows an interest in how our family is coping during and after a relocation, it improves my satisfaction, especially when they are trying to meet my needs and realize that it's important that a whole family needs to feel good about a relocation, not just the person they hired."

Along with genuine caring about the family's reaction and adjustment is the need for integrity. "Do not make promises that you cannot keep. Do not try and change the contract during the relocation," one spouse cautioned, as another said, "Be truthful about the job, the working conditions, the clients, the culture, etc. Don't lie about the cost of living or the likelihood the trailing spouse will find work." In other words, be upfront, be informative, and be open to dialogue, and "Listen, listen, listen."



Profile of the Typical Trailing Spouse

- * Married (97%) for at least 4 years (72%)
 - * Female (91%) with children (57%)
 - * Under 40 years of age (54%)
 - * Has been on an international assignment before (58%)
 - * Speaks two or more languages (58%)
 - * Is in a dual-career family (67%)
 - * Has a bachelor's degree or higher (84%)
 - * Had to give up a career to relocate (64%)
 - * Cannot continue a career or get paid employment due to work permit/visa restrictions (55%)
- Source: *The 2005 Trailing Spouse Survey*

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