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How to be a happy trailing spouse

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1: Expatriation is a chance to have a searching look at your career.

"It's a check-point for career development," says former trailing spouse Carol Gilroy, "an opportunity to think laterally about your skills and strengths."

Think about skill-building rather than job choices. Identify your work-related skills, then your transferable skills - those applicable to a wide range of jobs.

Gilroy, who went from New Zealand to England to Germany, has a bachelor's degree in psychology and a teaching diploma.

"If I had thought about it, I would have done teaching English as a second language before I went to Germany," she says.

2: Learn about your home-to-be, says Gilroy - "build up some excitement."

Research the country's job market and your industry's professional associations there. Seek specific information, like how the phone system works, and talk to others who have gone before you.

But, warns Gilroy, "you need to be careful to not take too much negative advice on board if people have had an unhappy experience, as quite a few people do."

If you will be seeking work, consider engaging someone who can coach you in the way interviews and workplace culture operate before you leave.

3: Assess yourself and your life.

A move is an opportunity to regroup and rethink. If you always wanted to get out of the rat race, stay home and spend more time with family, or be your own boss, this is the time to consider it.

Consider the issue of dependency, says Gilroy: "What's your previous experience with an imbalance of income? How are you going to retain some sort of independence?"

Uncertainty is another issue "if it's not clear how long you're going to be in hiatus. Be aware that the uncertainty of tenure means planning can be hard."

4: Expatriation is about compromise.

Don't blame relocation for everything that makes you unhappy. If you agreed to relocate, you are partly responsible for your own happiness.

That goes for your career, too: "You have to be willing to make compromises," says Gilroy, "like taking a more junior job to build up some credibility."

5: If you are planning some time out from the workforce, be aware that

boredom may well set in.

Gilroy thinks career-oriented women could do the expat wife thing for two years or so. Any longer, she says, and it starts to pall.

And that's the point at which some strategic thinking is required, she says: "How will I re-enter the workforce, and if I stay here, do I have to beef up my portable career?"

6: It's not a holiday from life.

Don't put things on hold waiting until the return home. And don't adopt the attitude that you're just passing through - that will hugely hinder assimilation.

Says Yvonne McNulty, the founder of [The Trailing Spouse](#): "Make wherever you live in the host country your home."

7: You will suffer culture shock.

Expect it, even embrace it. "Don't think that because you're going to an English-speaking country that you won't suffer culture shock," says Gilroy. "England was familiar but foreign. You've grown up with Coronation St and English programmes, and you think being there has got to be familiar.

"But you realise it's quite different. There's less tolerance and people can be quite insular. You don't recognise brands in the supermarket. The culture shock was greater than I thought it would be."

8: Think laterally and create your own opportunities.

Be resourceful. Set new goals. Take advantage of the on-line opportunities to further your career or education, says McNulty.

"The internet and email have revolutionised what is now possible for trailing spouses." It also offers excellent resources and support groups.

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