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By Escapeartist Staff - (0)

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The 2nd Annual Punta Sayulita Surf Classic

By Roberto Chuy Madrigal / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) •  [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



The Place You Thought You Knew

My arrival in Puerto Vallarta was uneventful except for having Customs Agents marvel at the 6' 6" SUP Skate- boards I had brought to Sayulita, one of them would be for the winner of the SUP Elite Race. Having had prior meetings with the Customs Director at the Puerto Vallarta airport and other Mexican authorities had been the key and they were all willing to help. As I waited for my bags and surfboards in the baggage area I was greeted by the Customs Director with a smile and I was soon on my way. It was great to see that the Mexican Government has indeed made some positive adjustments in their treatment of tourists coming into Mexico and that was clearly evident at every step of the way.

Once I came out into the arrivals greeting area there was Miguel from Punta Sayulita waiting for me, the weather was a nice 80 degrees and the smells, friendly people and colorful landscape that is Mexico filled my senses and put a smile on my face; it was great to be back. After a short drive north we rolled into Sayulita and it was not hard to see that the 2nd Annual Punta Sayulita Surf Classic was on. Banners hung over the streets and on light posts everywhere; I soon found myself immersed in the great vibe that permeates the village of Sayulita. It is definitely a place where one can feel at home and let your hair down. As always, there were pretty women from everywhere, local townspeople, surfers and children all present and involved in their daily hustle and bustle and everyone with a beautiful friendly smile. I wondered where were all of the negative things that the US Media continually hammer at Mexico with; this place is truly a paradise.

Bringing it all together

The results of my more than 6 months of collaborative effort with the Punta Sayulita Development Group would soon become a reality. It was time for the production phase of the event and it did not take long to start seeing it all come together. World renowned Jericho Poppler, Candice Appleby, Kalaia Jardine, Slater Trout, Sean Pointer, Scott Bass, Anthony Vela and Malibu's favorite son, Jimmy Gamboa and his wife Kim rolled into town as did the father and son teams of Matt and Zane Schweitzer and Aaron and Riggs Napoleon from Hawaii. Last year's winners Ikaika Kawai, Mary Osborne, and Chuck Patterson also arrived. Eco Warrior- James Pribram, Reef Check's Mary Luna and big wave Surfing, legends Garret Mc Namara, Scott Chandler and legendary surf, Zen master and old friend Gerry Lopez arrived. We even had Mike Downey, official announcer for the Battle of the Paddle show up. For a place not known for big waves, some of the world's top Big Wave Riders were now part of the large contingency of competitors, some having their go at small wave SUP surfing and racing.

Sayulita began filling up with visitors and cream of the crop professionals from as far away as Peru, Virgin Islands, Brazil, California and Hawaii. The media presence followed suit, photographers and camera crews were to be seen everywhere interviewing everyone and taking in the sights. This year's event was definitely a whole lot bigger as the town filled up with people and began rocking and whooping it up. For those that wanted to just kick back and relax, well it was not hard to disappear into the tranquility that is also Sayulita. Expectations ran high and the surf vibe increased a thousand fold. Who was going to win the races, the surfing competitions? For many of the local surfers and townspeople, some of the surfers present had previously only been seen in the pages of Surf, SUP

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Magazines, the Web and videos; now here they all were walking the streets of Sayulita. The local and neighboring cadre of hot surfers and SUP'ers would be surfing against legendary surfers which for many were their long time heroes. There was some first generation Mexican surf Legends around as well, the likes of Antonio Ochoa and your smiling promoter, Chuy Madrigal.

Never a Dull Moment in a Promoter's Life

As I walked and inspected the event site on the early morning of Friday, March 11, the now visible event structures were all in place and our crews were putting the finishing touches to the main beach structures and to the Concert stage which was a mere 20 feet from the water where small waves were lapping at the shoreline. Our State of Nayarit and Federal Tourism sponsored heavy machinery had already done a great job leveling and cleaning the beach and I had taken a precautionary step the night before and had them build a small 1.5' sand berm around the Concert stage just in case the tide got a little too close. As the sun came out over the hills my phone began ringing away and my computer was being bombarded by e-mails from all over the world:

Tsunami Warning, Japan and its people had suffered a horrific catastrophe; an 8.9 magnitude earthquake followed by a 30' plus Tsunami had caused incredible damage. Now it was time to deliberate the potential consequences of such an act of nature to Sayulita a half world away, especially to our event and Concert Stage which stood at the ocean's edge. The Civil Protection authorities closed all beaches on the entire Pacific coast of Mexico expecting the worse. After making numerous calls to Hawaii, California Civil Protection and Marine Safety agencies in California I stared out towards the beach at my 1.5' sand berm around the stage and shook my head. I looked towards the sky and said "God, please cut us a little slack, this all about Aloha and Ohana".

The Great Wall of Sayulita

After waiting for the Terror wave that could potentially sweep the beach and our event into oblivion, the ocean began retreating well after the Tsunami's predicted arrival leaving many fish stranded in the now shallows of the receding tide, including a giant Stingray that was now flopping around on the sand. Dozens of spectators and some competitors including my own son Steven ran out into the receding tide and gathered around the Stingray ahhhwing and oohing; that is when the Tsunami surge began rushing back towards the beach. Everyone screamed and ran for their lives but God and whatever other forces were at play had seemingly listened to my plea. The Tsunami was only a one foot wave that rushed toward the beach and got a few towels wet, but best of all, my 1.5 berm-barrier, Chuy's Great Wall of Sayulita, had stopped the surge; the Stage was saved and all was well for everything and everyone except for the Stingray; it became an impromptu meal for a few happy beach goers. Sayulita was out of danger and now the happy host to the Elite of the SUP and surfing world; the stage was set for a great competition.

Mishka's Concert

One of the highlights of the Classic's festivities was the Saturday evening benefit concert headlined by international Reggae recording artist, Mishka who played a seemingly never ending set of nearly three hours to the enjoyment of a packed beach of concert goers who sung and danced deep into the night and witnessed Mishka's first live performance in Mexico. The *j.k. livin* recording artist later commented that the "vibe of Sayulita" made it one of the best venues he has played in his career. The Concert has already been seen on the pages of You Tube and both the Sayulita Classic and the concert will soon air on Televisa's Tele-Hits.

The Competition

After two days of fierce competition that went on late into Sunday afternoon, Darren Eudaly of Laguna Beach, California, edged out Sayulita resident and 3-time Mexican National Longboard champion, Patricio "Ticho" Gonzalez, to take 1st Place in the Men's Longboard division with an incredible array of turns, cutbacks, nose riding and Longboard surfing skills. Last year, it had been the other way around, Ticho Gonzalez was the one who edged out Eudaly in the finals and taken home the win.

In the Women's division, Mary Osborne of Ventura, California successfully defended her women's Longboard title in a tightly contested final which featured top "Waterwoman" Candice Appleby of Hawaii and young guns Karina Rozunko, Hallie Rohr from California. The Men's SUP surf Division saw many favorites fall by the wayside during the earlier rounds of fierce competition. The Finals featured local favorite Guillermo "Tigre" Cadena, big wave super star, Garrett McNamara, and San Diego's young ripper Sean Poynter. When it was over, it was Poynter who came out on top barely squeezing by Cadena and taking home the title in a diminishing swell and some challenging surf conditions. Although McNamara rode the highest point value wave in the finals, he was unable to register a second scoring wave which resulted in his taking 3rd place. In spite of Cadena's incredible surfing it was Sean Poynter's radical turns in small waves that captured the judges' attention and give him the win.

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The grueling 10k paddle race and the SUP Elite (A crowd favorite) were both won by Slater Trout as the 17 year old professional from Maui held off a tough field of elite paddlers that included Anthony Vella, Zane Schweitzer, Chuck Patterson, Aaron Napoleon and local Sayulita favorite Ryan Helm. Slater seemed to have an extra gear in both races and showcased his impressive paddling technique with Vella and Schweitzer finishing close behind in 2nd and 3rd positions in both races. For the women, it was reigning "Battle of the Paddle" champion Candice Appleby of Hawaii winning the women's Elite Race title and Cabo's Schulyer Robbins the "Queen of the East Cape" placing first in the 10K distance race.

"It would have been nice to have more consistent, bigger waves so that the spectators could really see how talented these competitors are," remarked Kevin Roberts, a principle with event organizer Punta Sayulita. "However, the small waves did not diminish the great Ohana vibe and aloha spirit that surrounded the weekend event. Moreover, with surfing legends Gerry Lopez and Jericho Poppler competing and holding their own against the younger surfers, it was really a special treat for competitors and spectators alike," added Roberts. "Despite their years of experience, Lopez held his own quite impressively in the SUP Elite and Distance races and both Poppler and Lopez showcased their classic wave riding skills throughout the surfing competition".

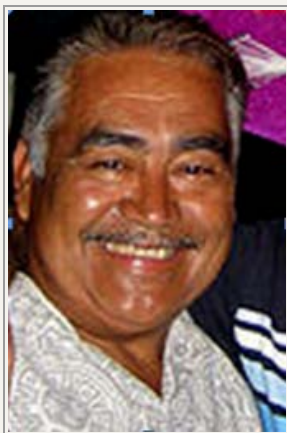
The Awards Presentation

Just like last years Awards Gala Affair, this year's celebration truly rocked. Everyone danced the night away to the beat of the popular local band "The Sayulites" that was also the opening band for the Mishka concert and Mishka made a special appearance and jammed with them. Don Pedro's Restaurant treated our palates with a delicious buffet of local fare and spirits and the Punta Sayulita Development Crew surprised us all once again with the organic design of this year's trophies to the delight of the contest winners. The Hamboard SUP Skateboard went to the Winner of the Elite race – Slater Trout, the smiling giant killer of course.

Sponsor abled Community Programs

As a result of the fantastic sponsor support, volunteers and competitors, there were respectable contributions raised by the Punta Sayulita Surf Classic. All funds will go towards supporting the activities of The Reef Check Foundation and the Punta Sayulita Foundation's 2011 Community programs. One such recipient program that took place during the week prior to the Punta Sayulita Surf Classic was the International Surfing Association (ISA) Level 1 Coaching Clinic for Surf and SUP Instructors. It was established to develop and enhance the education and regularization of instructors around the world and support the growth of the sport of surfing. The course was a great success and was completed by 25 surf instructors who participated in an intensive 3-day clinic. All participants received ISA Instruction Certifications. Additionally, prior to the start of the Classic competition, a group of 20 special-needs and underprivileged children had an incredible time at the beach and learned to surf under the personalized instruction of Jimmy Gamboa and members of his TheraSURF Foundation alongside many of the visiting professional surfers and local Sayulita surf instructors.

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Roberto Chuy Madrigal

Aloha Y'all

The Spirit of Aloha had once again permeated the event and been felt by all; the feel good vibe was everywhere and there was never a negative incident throughout the entire days of the event. The only sad thing that all event goers experienced was the realization that it was all over. We all said goodbye to new and old friends and bid farewell with a tear and a smile...Aloha for now.

Next year's event promises to be bigger and better and everyone is cordially invited to participate in the festivities and activities of the 3rd Annual Punta Sayulita Surf Classic, so see you all there.

(Complete results for the surf contests and paddle races are available at www.puntasayulitasurfclassic.com.)

Media inquiries, event photographs, videos and general information regarding the 2nd Annual Punta Sayulita Longboard & SUP Classic can be obtained by visiting www.puntasayulitasurfclassic.com or by

contacting Jose Luis Caselin at U.S. Toll Free (866) 947-6017 or +52 (329) 291-3957. For more information about the Punta Sayulita resort community visit www.puntasayulita.com.

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Evolution and Globalization of a Disaster

By Jamie Douglas / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) •  [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



Globalization of a Disaster

First things first. By now even the gauchos in Patagonia are completely aware that on Friday, March 11, 2011, at 02:46 AST, 18 Japanese Prefectures were severely rattled by a 9.0 earthquake that originated at a depth of only 32 km (20 miles) for about 6 minutes, with an ensuing series of tsunamis that reached heights of 10 meters (33 feet) racing as far as 10 km inland, destroying everything in its path, using the flotsam that was created by the first wave of destruction to act as battering rams.

All told, over 20,000 human souls were lost, many of their remains never to be recovered. But that was only the beginning of this mega-

disaster, which became known as the Tōhoku disaster, taking its name from the Tōhoku area of the Pacific Ocean. The epicenter was approximately 72 km (45 miles) east of the Oshika Peninsula of Tōhoku. In spite of seawalls, the physical destruction equaled that of the atomic bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Most unfortunately, right in the way of the tsunami was a 6 reactor General Electric nuclear power plant, owned by the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), using 1950's technology and taking shortcuts around recommendations and regulations that were supposed to be in effect, such as storing spent fuel rods on site and having the power generators required for the cooling pumps located at ground level. Of course, with the 20/20 hindsight that we all are born with, this should have never been allowed to happen, but rather than dwelling of the cause and effect of this catastrophe, let us look at the short and long term consequences of what happened, and how it may affect everyone on the planet in one way or another.



6 reactor General Electric nuclear power plant

First, the very short-term implications: The loss of human life is deplorable of course and any and all assistance you may render through the Red Cross and other reputable institutions will help some of the worst affected. But the mission of this article is to show the possible long range manifestations that are, like Reaganomics, trickle down. (Sorry I could not resist)

The big talking heads of business and finance have already declared this to be a negligible disaster in terms of the long range outlook, but I beg to differ with the "experts," just as I did when

they were dismissing the economic indicators of a deep recession back in 2008. This is a disaster unfolding that first of all will affect an untold number of Expatriates living and working in Japan, and then with the ensuing energy problems caused by the nationwide rolling blackouts, the entire supply chain of hundreds if not thousands of items that have parts manufactured in Japan will also be affected. It will be impossible to bake silicone chips or make touch screen glass and many other components and items used in everyday products. One so-called financial "expert" claimed that this crisis would reduce the price of crude oil as Japan's consumption was reduced. He

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actually had facts and figures showing, falsely, that the price of crude would drop to below \$100 by the weekend. (It closed at \$108.31 on April 1st, up by US\$1.22 per barrel.)

Many manufacturers of high-end automobiles throughout the world have shut down their assembly lines because the manufacturers of extremely important subassemblies such as instrument clusters and sensors have been impacted to the point where many have [had to curtail or outright shut down production in Japan](#).

Already US manufacturers of automobiles have advised their dealers not to order cars in some colors, as the pigment factory in Sendai that formerly supplied them was destroyed by the tsunami and over 50% of their workforce is missing and presumed dead. The same goes for the Nikon Optical and Camera factories, which already announced a postponement of the introduction of their new high-end models, due to the destruction caused to their facilities.

Automotive assembly plants in Mexico are starting to suffer from parts shortages, and the true cost of "just in time" inventory control is beginning to manifest itself. Of course with the millions in savings that have been accumulated over the last few years, you would think that they can absorb their losses easily, but the fact of the matter is that, with the world economy being in the shape that it is in, the human toll of extended unemployment in any industry, wherever it may be, will have great economic impacts on local economies worldwide. The interconnected planet lives a hand-to-mouth existence.

As for all the displaced expats who are out in the cold at the tail end of the Japanese winter, my sympathies are with you, after all, you relocated to a place where people are very civil to each other, crime is very low, and your job was superb. You had congenial colleagues you were working with and more sushi bars than 7-11's. Who would have thought, less than a month ago, that you had settled into a potential nuclear disaster? Not you, not me, and certainly not the Alien Overlords who transferred you to Nippon.



photo by Asia News – used with their permission

As far as the immediate future is concerned, many of you in the financial and technical sector will be transferred by your companies to other locales, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, China, or Taiwan, where the subsidiaries of some of the Japanese industrial giants are working feverishly, recreating infrastructure to replace the output lost from their Japanese facilities. That of course will take time and great effort, and I am sure that engineers of the world will be called upon to recreate and rebuild that which was destroyed.

The many of you who are in Japan as ESL instructors, other teaching positions, or as independent agents, your futures are much more

uncertain, should a mass evacuation become mandatory. One can only hope that the valiant efforts being put in by the brave men at the Fukushima nuclear facilities will bear fruit.

As of this writing, international "experts" have concluded that a meltdown is in progress. Those pesky experts! I, never having had the displeasure of actual radiation sickness, but having learned from the example of the courageous Madame Curie, decided a long time ago to not pay too much attention to what the "experts" say. After all, the day when 3 Mile Island had its minor incident, I was on the way from Hawaii to Europe, and my jet flew directly through the cloud of radioactive gases that were being vented at that very moment. Fortunately we were traveling at about 500 mph at 25,000 feet and only spent mere seconds in that toxic atmosphere. Another time I was in Little Rock, Arkansas, attending family matters and business meetings, when I got up in the morning and turned on the local news, to find out that during the night a Titan III nuclear missile exploded in its silo, and the warheads were missing, but the "experts" assured us that there was nothing to worry about. By 10 am, I was on a flight to Miami, connecting to Bogotá, Lima, and eventually Santiago de Chile, eventually ending up in French Guyana, where I spent several months eating great food, drinking mediocre French wine (it had not been stored properly), snorkeling, and sailing.

They eventually found the missing warheads, and the "experts" claim that there was never any danger.

So there are my feelings about such incidents, but I feel the situation in Japan could be quite serious. Infrastructure can be replaced or relocated, but what if? What if the whole thing went postal, blowing used fuel rods and all? With Tokyo being just to the southwest, radiation and radioactive iodine has already been detected in the water supply there, and a slaughtered cow has shown contamination as well. With the emergency introduction of salt water from

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the sea, additional problems are possible, such as salt encrustation of the fuel rods, thereby raising the internal temperatures even further beyond the danger level. So what would I do? I would leave on one of the first flights heading west, to Singapore or Hong Kong, leaving behind all my un-necessary accoutrements, to watch the unfolding scenario from farther afield. (All theoretical of course, as I am following this from Patagonia, Argentina)

What should you do? Act the courageous western entrepreneur and stick it out, after all, the "experts" said it was safe; or should you wait until you have to be evacuated by your home country, or best case scenario, it will all miraculously go away; or should you consider using some of your hard earned expat money to leave while there are seats available?

My correspondent from Tokyo reported to me tonight that the streets are relatively empty, and in neon-light-crazy Japan, most lights are out. Fuel is severely restricted, and every few hours the power goes out for 2-3 hours. The people tend to spend more time indoors, glued to their TV's listening to the calming denials of the officials from TEPCO, as well as an assortment of health and other government officials who are being dragged in front of the cameras to assure the citizens that Godzilla has been captured, and soon everything will be back to normal.

Here, in its full text, you can see, what the status of the plant was, as of April 1st, according to TEPCO's press release. <http://www.tepco.co.jp/en/press/corp-com/release/11040107-e.html> . By the time you read this, they will have new updates on this site, as well.

In personal conversations I have had with an engineer on the site, who insists on confidentiality because he is not an authorized spokesperson (I generally hate these disclaimers, but as he is a friend's brother in law, I feel I must comply),

"The situation here is grave. No one really knows what is going on inside the reactor vessels. We are receiving expert advice from all over the world, but no country has ever had to deal with a situation such as the one we are experiencing here. The sea is contaminated, the soil is contaminated, and the ground water stream beneath us is contaminated. I feel like I am sitting on the world's largest disaster to be, caused by nature's fury and man's incompetence and lack of respect for the immense power and danger that was created with minimal safeguards and oversight. We are still in the building up of the catastrophe mode, and will be for several more weeks. My colleagues and I believe that we are in for several months of intense work, and that some of our more senior associates will bear the burden of much of the containment work, as with their advanced age, they are less likely to suffer the effects of radiation. We are also receiving new radiation suits from France, as well as their best experts. I have evacuated my family to Okinawa, where my wife's family originally came from in 1946. Everyone here is scared!"

When I asked about the potential for a meltdown, his reply was that most engineers on site think it is in progress already, and that with the amount of people that will be exposed, there will likely be many casualties.

I have a feeling that this will bring a temporary freeze to the growth of the nuclear industry, accompanied by a chorus of protest from the lobbyists representing the industry group, and soon construction will resume. Today's technology is vastly improved over that of 30 years ago; if only the world's nuclear engineers could come up with a final solution for the storage and disposal of the spent fuel rods, everything would be OK. Until then I guess we have to satisfy our hunger for energy with more deep water drilling around the planet, and take our chances on another BP Macondo disaster, or maybe another ageing series of nuclear plants going senile.

About the author: Jamie Douglas is an Adventurer, Writer and Photographer with an amazing array of Nikon equipment, and a lifetime of experience traveling and documenting. He is always available for assignments and new adventures. [[contact him](#)]

Post Script: If anyone really wants to hear why "Only an Expert can deal with the Problem," I highly recommend Laurie Andersen's latest conceptual album, Homeland, which contains the cut, "Only an Expert." Laurie is married to Lou Reed and she is one of my true musical heroes, because as a performance artist, she writes things that not only make sense, they make you think!

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What's Motivating You to Move Abroad and How Far Will You Leave America Behind?

By Susan Beverley / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Asset Protection](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



Are you planning to Escape From America?

According to data from the IRS relating to the number of Americans who renounce their citizenship annually, the numbers are dramatically on the increase.

More than 200 Americans turned their back on the United States in 2008, 731 made the exceptionally difficult decision to renounce their citizenship in 2009, and in 2010 1,485 individuals gave up their right to an American passport, according to 'corrected totals' from renunciationguide.com.

When you consider that an estimated 5.2 million Americans currently live abroad, you would be

forgiven for thinking that these figures are an insignificant fraction barely worthy of comment – however, according to the New York Times: "[waiting periods to meet with consular officers to formalize renunciations have grown.](#)" What's more, where once even just the *thought* of turning your back on your nation was regarded as treasonous, nowadays the possibility is openly discussed amongst American expatriate groups both online and offline.

With this thought in mind, we decided to interview a number of our readers who are currently actively planning their move overseas or who have recently relocated. We wanted to know what the motivating factors are for each soon-to-be expatriate for their proposed relocation – and whether any Americans now living abroad were considering taking their move to the next level and renouncing their US citizenship altogether...after all, what is it that pushes people to take such drastic action?

Brad and Tori from Springfield, Illinois are moving to Europe in the summer, and when asked for the primary motivating factor behind their relocation decision, this is what they told us:

"To sum up all the reasons for us making the move in one we'd have to say that it's all to do with the economy at home right now. As a family we've been personally impacted by job loss, debt, lack of finance and the threat of foreclosure...and if you look at it and break it right down, as we have been *forced* to do, it is because of the state of the economy in America right now.

Both of us are college graduates and we started early on our career paths, we feel we've been contributors rather than takers when it comes to this country's economy – but we've been left without any support from the government or from the likes of banks when we need it. Our kids are at an age where we really needed to make a decision about their schooling quite fast when the subject of moving overseas first came up – but then again, where's the investment going to come from for schools in this country anyway, wouldn't they be better off schooled abroad?

By the time we started weighing up the pros and cons there was very little stacked in America's favor, and now we can't wait to move. We really don't think there is anything for us here now; there are few jobs and long lines of applicants, we can barely afford our home repayments and insurances, yet no one's around to help us, so what's there for our kids to look forward to?

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We're still proud to be American, but that's because of our heritage and our culture and our friends and family: it's got absolutely nothing to do with the economy, the government, the previous government or the foreign policy for example. However, renouncing our citizenship would be taking the move too far, we've briefly spoken about it but we would feel like we were betraying our families if we did that."

Cam from Washington has recently relocated to South America and he has a very different view about renunciation.

"I wish I'd made the move years ago – I falsely believed that my work, my family and friends were all enough to keep me from going stir crazy at the state of the nation, but to be honest, it's just got too much in America now.

Everyone talks about it being down to post 9/11 reactions and changes – but in my opinion it was getting bad way before then. And if you believe the conspiracy theorists, the US administration knew plenty about that before it happened anyway and they just use it as an excuse to push through illegal bullying legislation.

The Patriot Act has me, as an expatriate, labeled the same way as terrorists and money launderers – yet the good old IRS still wants to tax any income I make to support myself even though I'm making it overseas. I take nothing and give everything when it comes to my so-called 'home country' and in truth, I hate it.

I'd never met anyone who'd gone down the path of renunciation before I moved here – sure I'd thought about it, but only along the lines of 'wouldn't it be good if I could just change everything – permanently!' But now I know much more about it, it's something I would seriously consider doing.

I'm a newbie abroad though, and I've been warned that I may feel homesick sometime soon – right now I love the freedom I've got and the way people live here, so I find it really hard to imagine that I'm going to want to move back to the States...but hey, I'll give it some time and some more thought and then maybe, why not? After all, there is nothing great about having US citizenship anymore as far as I am concerned anyway."

Jenna from Greenville, South Carolina will be on her way to her new life in Canada as this goes to publication. She said:

"America has got it all wrong – taxation is high, the economy is damaged, the rich still manage to evade their responsibilities, and despite many pledges to the contrary, this administration is not exactly helping the poor is it?

There are no honest politicians in America – don't get me wrong, I'm not naive, I don't believe any politician is anything other than self-serving, but in the States it's beyond a joke. Also, everyone is suing everyone...and if you want to get anywhere, you have to threaten to sue! What kind of a system is that?

The final thing that pushed my decision was an article I read about the amount of information that's kept on me based on my social security number...and what's the betting some of that information is inaccurate. Things like that can affect your life for the worse and you don't even know why. And one thing that will affect your life and the quality of it is the amount you can afford to pay for medical insurance. If you don't have decent insurance you won't get decent care, period.

The tax situation in this country is out of control too – and I am disgusted that it's always the little guy who gets the bad deal. Would I renounce my citizenship? Maybe, if it made a valid point to the government that they actually listened to...it is something I would consider, yes. But it is extreme."

Finally we spoke to Mike from California who's heading to Asia later this year.

"My neighborhood has gone from good to bad to worse – drugs, gangs and guns rule and I genuinely don't feel totally safe around here anymore. My decision to move overseas came from a slow but steadily growing feeling of unease at everything from the crime to the fact that ironically, America is a police state nowadays – and yet the policing is of the innocents.

Even saying that I want to relocate and looking at the paperwork I need to complete to get my tax affairs in order makes me feel as though I'm regarded as a criminal with something to hide! I don't just blame this administration – I blame the last one too! American politicians have finally united in screwing up the country – America's not the land of the free, it's not great and good – it's not my home any more.

I don't want to vote when I expatriate, I don't want to pay taxes for services I don't use and won't even be able to access if I do need them, I don't want to watch more violence and more lies on the streets and in office. The over-regulation in the US is oppressive, and it comes from all angles because it is being indoctrinated into the very core of the country. That ain't gonna change in my lifetime – so I have to be the one to make the change.

I spent a long time looking for a country where there was a balance between taxation and services, support and

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entrepreneurialism...and then I looked closer at the state of the nation and the general feeling of the people. I did have to look for a long time before I found anywhere I would be happy to call home because you know what, the worst aspects of the American influence have permeated far too many societies globally.

I've never even considered renunciation as a concept let alone as a potential, but now the prospect has been brought to my attention I won't be able to ignore it."

Clearly the state of the American nation is the motivating factor behind all these people deciding to change their country of residence in order to improve their quality of life. Increasing numbers of residents turning their back on their home country, and increasing numbers of expatriates then turning their back on their own citizenship should be setting off alarm bells right across America.

Perhaps America actually risks crumbling beneath the weight of over-intrusion it insists upon having in people's lives. This need to know everything comes from a national psyche steeped in paranoia which is harbored throughout society and promoted by the very politicians US citizens are being forced to choose between to run their once allegedly great nation. Not everyone is buying into it though: some are leaving American shores behind, some are leaving their American passports behind.

Please note: names and some personal details have been changed to protect the identities of our interviewees.

About the author: Susan Beverley is a writer and editor for Escape From America Magazine and also writes for and maintains [Expat Daily News](#) – the expat news blog for [EscapeArtist.com](#). She traveled extensively before becoming an expat herself having found a place to call home in South America where she has lived since 2005. She understands the concerns, needs and difficulties that expats face from first-hand experience and is dedicated to supporting and encouraging anyone who is looking for a new nation to call home. [[send her an email](#)]

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What Kind of People are You?

By RJ Palano / Apr 11 • Categorized as [International Real Estate](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



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Be honest, we are all judgmental. As soon as we meet someone new, we are judging them on their looks, voice, neatness, clothes, and speech pattern. We make instant judgments when we meet someone that can be changed as we get to know them – unless that first impression was so bad that you would never want to communicate with them again. We also judge people on the articles they write, as well as their responses to such articles. Furthermore, we are all self-serving and we act in our own natural self-interest. There was only one Mother Teresa and I doubt that any of you readers are the next Mahatma Gandhi or Jesus Christ. No, this is not an article on religion, spiritual beliefs or political beliefs of any kind.

This article is about common sense, self preservation, and taking responsibility for yourself while not interfering in the lives of others. I am not interested in creating controversy and my goals, while self-serving as they are, are to educate people to take responsibility for their lives, future, and their families.

To that end it is critical to take care of your finances in order to do the above. I am proud to say that I am a capitalist and an entrepreneur and I am not a burden to society. In fact, I am one small spoke in the wheel that helps the economy turn by my efforts to create business which then creates jobs, ultimately helping people provide for their families. I don't do it for any altruistic purpose; I do it to make a profit which enables me to create business and more job opportunities which allow other businesses to grow as a result of my working six to seven days a week, ten to twelve hours a day.

I choose to do this, and I've earned my way through life. I've fallen, gotten up, failed, and succeeded and nothing is more satisfying than to recover from failed enterprises.

In a recent article I wrote for EscapeArtist.com entitled, "[You Can't Handle the Truth](#)", a few readers blogged some interesting comments. I have no desire to engage in any one on one response to these readers since by the nature of their comments it's obvious they missed the point of the article.

Some people complain about problems or people and bellyache about anyone, trying to create a better life for themselves through the knowledge they've gained and their courage to take action. Misery does like company.

I have nothing but gratitude for the people that made and continue to make this country great and I love what Teddy Roosevelt said so many years ago,

"It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose faced is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly, who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions, and spends himself in a worthy cause, who, at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement; and who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat."

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Eleanor Roosevelt had some comments of her own:

“Great minds discuss ideas,

Average minds discuss events,

Simple minds discuss people.”

The above comments bring me back to the anti-defense, anti-war bloggers that responded to my article:

Fellas, get a grip and get a life or wear a diaper! We have freedom of speech in this country so you are free to write and say what you like. But for gosh sakes, you missed the point of the article to promote your ideology on how big government is necessary to take care of everybody. I am the first to admit that some people need help through no fault of their own and am a firm believer in being charitable. So are big businessmen, like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet. But but but, the government is out of control, is too big and is fiscally irresponsible!

For the insecure people that think that government was created to take care of your every need, kindly disregard the rest of this article as you won't get it – again.

The points in the article **“You Can't Handle the Truth”** were as follows:

1. Social Security is failing – see links
 1. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/25/business/economy/25social.html>
 2. <http://www.dailyfinance.com/story/retirement/trouble-with-social-security-payouts-top-revenue-this-year/19413717/>
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 1. <http://www.ajc.com/news/dekalb/public-pension-crisis-threatens-886685.html>
 2. <http://www.ajc.com/news/gap-between-public-private-889282.html>
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1. Stimulus Money will create inflation and the devaluation of our currency – see link

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123388703203755361.html>

1. Forget Detroit – it's lost. – see link

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/23/us/23detroit.html>

1. The truth about government statistics – do they tell all the truth? – see links
 1. <http://seekingalpha.com/article/117296-true-unemployment-rate-is-not-reflected-in-government-numbers>
 2. <http://www.shadowstats.com/>
 3. http://www.soxfirst.com/50226711/government_accounting_what_are_the_real_numbers.php

The article was not about the Defense budget, it was about how you can preserve your wealth and create more while others are losing their money!

It was about making lemonade from the lemons of this economy. To that end, you can't and shouldn't rely on the government to take care of you. You should educate yourself and make informed decisions with your money so you can take care of yourself.

I have no political agenda and I can't be bothered with all the world events. For certain, I don't know about a lot of things and I strive to continually learn more and improve myself. The world doesn't owe me or you a living or a guarantee of any kind but I do hope that I've made a positive difference in the lives of many people before I leave this place.

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Living in Thailand: Too much fun off the tourist track

By John McMahon / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



Koh Talu

There are several types of expats in Thailand, the corporate employees in Bangkok and the already wealthy who come to live a life that's even grander than they could afford from wherever they came. They exist in a world of TV reality, sequestered in gated compounds of luxury villas, served by live in maids, chauffeured around the city to well covered events in Mercedes. In a country with a staggering rate of poverty they vacation at exclusive resorts on privately owned islands, these are the expats the government loves.

Then there are the pensioned retirees; hordes of aged men from Europe, England, Australia and America come to live their days out measuring their retirements glass by glass of cheap beer. They are often married to Thai women from poor backgrounds and set up in their home villages elevating the entire extended family to a level of modest upper middle class. The expats that butter the government's bread.

But there's another much smaller group, foreigners who live in the land of smiles by their wits. A clever, cunning group who figure out ways to make ends meet in spite of the xenophobic labor laws. I don't mean long term tourists or back packers who fall into the edutainment industry for a term, or even a year, nor those who come for three months a year spent in a time share playing golf. I mean people who are here twelve months a year; year after year, who have driver's licenses, who speak the language. These are people who don't want to wait until they're in their mid sixties to live life on their own terms and are somehow making it happen. Some are shysters for sure; in real estate, or bogus investment companies or any of a thousand other age old scams but others are entrepreneurs, inventors, dreamers, digital nomads, gamblers, pie-in-the-skiers and after ten years I count myself one of them. The ones the government hates.

I didn't have a scheme when I came here; I didn't plan on coming here at all. Six months after watching the world trade center burn against the perfect blue of a September sky from the grand street park in Brooklyn I went to Malaysia. I had no motive going there outside of touring the country starting with a thirty day trek through Taman Negara National Park, the country's largest wild life preserve. When I emerged after a month in the park I went to the sea side to recover from the trip, I had lost a fair amount of weight and was covered with tiny festering wounds and bites.

It was a cheap place where you made your own food, there was no pool or amenities but it sat on the river which flowed into the sea just a couple hundred meters away. It was here that I met up with a friend from Brooklyn who told me she thought something odd was happening in my building and maybe I should make some phone calls to find out what was going on. I couldn't be bothered right away, I was relaxing but once I did my return was immediate.

What had been happening in my building wasn't just odd it was highly illegal. I had been in the building for five years but never met the landlord because he was doing time in a penitentiary for racketeering. He was paroled while I was gone, which may have been an oversight since the first thing he did in the free world was to commit fifteen class A felonies by forcibly evicting all tenants, old ladies and young hipsters alike. By the time I arrived my

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apartment had been remolded and re-rented at four times the rent I had been paying, everything I owned, from my antique Scandinavian steam bent birch chair to a fresh change of underwear had been trashed.

As a group we took the landlord to NYC housing court where we spent a lot of time being laughed at. My upstairs neighbor who had lived in the building since the mid fifties died during the process of trying to get the landlord to make an appearance. After the first round I decided the case was going nowhere, the law had no interest in us, and it was clear the landlord had paid off the right people.

My decision was to flee, to start over in New York with a backpack full of hot weather clothing in the year 2002 seemed a doomed prospect so I booked a flight to Bangkok and left my job with \$1,400 in my pocket and the promise of a bench to sleep on when I arrived.

The first year in Thailand, my orientation wasn't normal. Instead of heading to Sukhumvit Road where the older expats while their days drinking beer and ogling young girls, or wallowing into the mass of back packers around Kao Sarn Road I settled in an old style stilt house directly across from Chitlada Palace, the opulent home of the king in Bangkok, with a 33 year old Thai who had spent much of his life in Australia.

Pops was a surfer and a cook who immigrated to Sydney at fifteen to live with his sister after his parents were killed in a car crash. He could speak Thai and English but couldn't speak either very well, his Thai being that of a subservient school boy and his English picked up and pinned together between kitchens and beaches. I don't know why he was in Thailand, he had no money and no ambition and though he did nothing but smoke cigarettes' and watch an old TV fade in and out between channels he seemed to get bigger and more muscular every day.

I had to work and found a job, seemingly a dream job, right away teaching art history to advanced arts and design students at a very good university. The grand ideas I had fell apart very quickly as I learned that my job was going to be more about helping rich kids write application letters to foreign university then imparting any aesthetic wisdom, no one wanted to look at the pretty pictures. So after spending all day lying about students I didn't know I would return to our stilted hovel where Pops would be laid out smoking and asking, "Can you pay this bill mite, she's late already, yeah?"

Pops was no help assimilating to living in Thailand, the house was in a low income Thai neighborhood. Markets and food shops a long walk away and no other foreigners about so that I was an oddity to be committed on constantly. There was no international anything and Pops refused to teach me Thai, help me find food I could eat or locate myself in the city, the only good turn he ever did me was to introduce Pun and I.

Pun was a rich girl who had attended NYU, loved art and western guys and we fell in together right away. She quickly got me out of the University and into a position at a mining company her family owned, and out of Pops and into a cheap apartment. My job was to edit and write investment material for the companies' potash mines in Thailand. At the time I didn't know what Potash was, which was fine because other than going to clubs and parties and hanging out in Puns condo on the eighteenth floor of the All Seasons Tower my job was occasionally to be a young Caucasian face at various meetings; in Japan I was a geologist, in Burma a chemist.

Eventually I got out of Bangkok and headed south to help design a family retreat for Pun in the tiny beach town of Bon Sapon. This was my second year in Thailand and I still didn't speak more than fifty words of Thai, I didn't have to in Bangkok.

Now suddenly I was in a town of about five thousand people, supposedly directing a crew of men illiterate in their own language. It was a joke, but it wasn't expected to be anything else. Pun had to get rid of me as she was getting married and didn't want her perspective groom to know about me. It was arranged and out in the open, I didn't mind, I hated Bangkok and I loved Bon Sapon, I loved the sea and being surrounded by the jungle and having a motorcycle to cruise around the small roads at break neck speeds with no helmet and no shirt, and I liked being away from all the other foreigners it made me feel like I was doing something special. The crew and I got along great since I didn't ask them to do anything, we all lazed about, occasionally clearing some trees but mostly dozing and drinking beer in the afternoon and they taught me all the time. They taught me Thai; both the language and the culture.

This lasted for about six months until Puns father stopped the money flow, my salary as, well whatever I was, and the crews as well. The project we had never started was put on hold and we all moved on. By this time I had an idea for a business, but I needed money to start it.

On my many temporary visa trips to Burma I had found a wealth of crafts and antiques for sale at prices that seemed to low to sustain life. I had picked the town to run it from, knew the places to

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crafts and antiques in Burma

buy and had an importer in New York who wanted to do business. But I needed money for stock, staff and licenses, so I sold the only thing in the world I had of any value. My one possession the felonious landlord back in New York hadn't destroyed or sold was a drawing I had stored with a friend by a famous Austrian artist and with some finagling I sold it to gallery for about \$25,000.

On this nut I set up in Kanchanaburi, home of the famous death railway and the fictional bridge over the river Kwai. It was an ideal location, close

enough to Bangkok for overnight visits, with a enough of a international culture of tourists and ex-pats to get most of the foreign goodies I had craved in the south but not big enough to make the place a haven for touts and crooked merchants.

I spent a lot of time travelling the small border towns of Thailand and Burma making deals with little shops and families of artisans to make or transport Lacquer wear, textiles, carved wood objects, jewelry and finely made knives. Along the way I picked up antiques and honed my language skills out of necessity.

I ran this business for three years, vetting products, dealing with shipping nightmares and paying bribes to officials on both sides of the border until I had an offer to buy me out lock stock and barrel from a young woman in New York. I didn't have much to sell, a web site, a list of contacts and an export number, but she was offering more money than I had ever had at one time so I did it.



Burmese Nat Figure

After the sale I continued to deal in antiques on various internet sites, I had done a lot of research while I ran my export business and found that there was almost nothing out there on the vast web about carved catapult handles and nat figures from Burma. I also work as copywriter and editor and advisor on foreign etiquette for several local businessmen.

I still live in Kanchanburi and almost a decade since I arrived in Bangkok with a few pairs of shorts in a backpack and just over a grand in my pocket I'm still single. I've been everywhere in Thailand and most everywhere in the surrounding four countries. I rent a two bedroom house closed in by fruit trees and scrub jungle on a small piece of land about eight kilometers outside of the town proper that runs to \$100.00 U.S. a month- water, electric and DSL included. Over the years I've gotten used to spiders the size of Frisbees leaping down from the ceiling, scorpions in my bed and snakes coiled in the corner of my bathroom. I've written three novels, countless short stories and even make money occasionally with a travel piece.

I haven't out grown riding my motorcycle at breakneck speeds

up in the mountains but I wear a helmet these days. I spend a lot of time kayaking the Kwai Rivers and reading in my hammock. No one would call this luxury, money is always a concern, but freedom it is and I've done it on an average yearly income of no more than \$10,000.

About the author: Ten years ago after being illegally evicted from his apartment in Brooklyn John said to hell with all of this and left for Bangkok with no plan and no real money. Since then he has lived in five different provinces working, traveling and living in a strange place somewhere between expat and local. He learned to speak Thai, learned to cope with the customs, he has come to terms in his own way with the strange beliefs and cultural hypocrisy all on his own, having never married or even cohabitated with a Thai woman in country that in most foreigners minds exists solely for that purpose.

If you are thinking of [Living in Thailand](#) there are some great articles and resources available for you to browse for free on [EscapeArtist.com](#).

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Jon and Vonda's Mexico Adventure Life Part II

By Jonathan Look / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Overseas Retirement](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



So Many Places to Consider

Did you read Mexico article #1? If not you can find it by [clicking here](#).

Since Vonda and I are interested in living in such a wide variety of places we are always considering many different places to live. The plan is to move to a new place each year for the next ten years. I am writing this so we can discuss our thinking a little bit. We didn't want to just experience places as vacationers but as residents; albeit temporary, and as participants in our communities. We want to take the time to make new friends, actually know new areas and adjust ourselves to the rhythm of life as we find it.

A year is a necessary compromise between

depth of experience and variety of it. A year gives us exposure to all the seasons, the festivals, the migrations and a multitude of other things that operate on a perennial cycle. A year also gives us a fair chance to see many different countries and ways of life without rushing too much.

The criteria we use to select places are personal only to us and anyone looking to do similar things might have a completely different set of goals and criteria. Even though we might have different goals and aspirations we could wind up in many of the same places. Great places are like that – they have so much to offer people of different lifestyles that they become meccas to people searching for what they see as good. I will discuss Vonda and my criteria later but please know that it is changeable, subject to finances, stage of life issues, political climate, family and even whimsy. We know there are no right answers. With limited lifespans we know we have to make choices and compromises. One compromise we are not going to make is to just sit in place.

Before I get to criteria I want to make clear that the one thing that we are immediately discounting is "conventional wisdom". In contemporary America it seems that many people's "convention" is sitting at home in an easy chair looking for sources to confirm what they already cling to as their "wisdom". It also seems to hold that those with the strongest opinions about a place often have the least amount of information and what little they do have is often culled from the narrowest of sources. That is not to say that we don't listen to differing opinions, but we do our own homework and we do our own individual plan.

Another thing to bear in mind is that there comes a point where in order to move forward – you have to really begin moving forward. Research is great and necessary but at some point doing research can become a crutch for not doing anything. You can never eliminate all of the unknowns and fear of them can become paralyzing. We personally find that in some ways you can also crush the spirit out of an adventure by becoming too familiar with your subject. There is huge joy in to be had in finding things through serendipity.

So what are we looking for as we run toward "Life Part II"? First off we want places that will challenge us, expand our comfort zones and contrast strongly with what have become accustomed to. We want places with a sense of community, an interesting environment and plenty of outdoor activity. Ideally it would be populated by a variety of open minded people that are curious about the world and willing to independently form their own *informed* opinions. We want to meet people that listen to reason, learn when new facts are presented and embrace a certain "joie de vivre". Also, all things being equal we like warm climates, spicy food and optimistic people!

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Correspondingly we also want a certain amount of infrastructure. Weaving our own clothes, hunting for every meal and digging latrines is not for us; at least not at our home base. We want some of the things we are accustomed to. Running water, (not necessarily on the grid) electricity and reasonably stress-free ways of getting groceries are required. Internet service, simple restaurants and roads that don't require four wheel drive are desired. An international airport less than a few hours away, competent medical care and a little night life would be a sublime.

Weighting all of these factors but ignoring a few we have picked Xcalak, a small fishing village near the Belize border in Mexico as our number one stop. We chose it for its rich history, diverse culture, warm climate, beautiful beaches, acceptable cost of living, smiling people, easy but not too easy access, delicious and widely variable food. Mariachi music, moonlit strolls, SCUBA diving, fishing, cenotes, tropical birds, Mayan Ruins, rum drinks, warm tortillas and Margaritas don't hurt. I does have all that but to be perfectly honest, in the end we just went with our untested instincts because we like the feel of the place.

Xcalak is located on the Xcalak National Reef Park just south of the Sian Ka'an biosphere reserve. Just a few miles off shore, rising from over 3,000 foot waters is the Chinchorro Banks, part of the world's second largest coral reef, a ship graveyard, pristine diver's paradise, migratory bird refuge and our new front yard. Among the things we will have to contend with are sand on tile floors, water from a cistern, mosquitos, the occasional scorpion and no heating or air conditioning. Overall to us that seems like a pretty small trade off and a good place to get our feet wet as we begin our adventure.

We are going to learn to speak Spanish, the history of the place and to the extent possible try to blend in with the local culture. We will be learning to shop for and cook with local ingredients and perhaps even learn how to harvest coconuts. There are plenty of opportunities for travel and sightseeing in this remarkable corner of Mexico. Because we are in an area that is off the grid there is little light pollution and an amazing opportunity to study the night skies. I am excited about being able to take my photography to the next level. I am also very interested in learning underwater photography, learning to play guitar and improving my writing. Oh yeah, did I mention that I intend to do a bit of chillin'. Vonda can't wait to paint the landscape from the roof and whatever new tropical birds we discover. She is also very excited about volunteering with the local school to help teach art classes.

We expect it will be hard but, after one year; we are going to pack it all up and move on to someplace new. There are so many great places on our tiny planet and we want to experience in depth as many as possible. Will we come back to Xcalak one day, perhaps to live permanently? Maybe!

We are still weighing to possibilities for after Mexico. Currently on our ever growing "short list" and in no certain order is: Croatia – Ecuador – Portugal – Australia – New Zealand – Argentina – Belize – France – Nicaragua – Honduras – Italy – Vietnam – Thailand – Romania – Greece – Columbia – Bulgaria

Is our list special; absolutely. Is it unique; yes. Is our list uniquely special; not really. There are THOUSANDS of places that are unique and special just waiting to be discovered. SEVERAL of them could be perfect for you. It is our list, it is incomplete, flexible and you can't have it! But please make yourself one based on your circumstances, your dreams and your desires. We reserve to right to change our mind on any of this for any or no reason at any time and so should you. We see that as freedom. If we wind up in the same places, and I suspect we will from time to time, we look forward to meeting you.

Please share your thoughts and ideas with us as we move through this adventure. We read all the mail we receive would like to be able to use it as a gauge of what you are interested in, new places to consider and a source of tips to share with other members of "the tribe". Thanks for indulging us with your time as we move through to "Life Part II".

To follow our travels and experiences please provide us with your name and mail and we will send you stories and lots of pictures as we travel along...

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About the Author: Jonathan Look, Jr. has along with his wife Vonda recently arranged his life so that he can

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pursue his passion for travel, photography and writing full time. He believes that awareness is the first step in teaching others to be compassionate and as a consequence is especially interested in using his photography to help impoverished peoples, endangered cultures and ecosystems. Jonathan is available for assignment work and can be reached at through his website...

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My Argentine Kitchen

By Kate Kirby / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



My Argentine Kitchen

I have always been passionate about food and since moving to Argentina one of my great pleasures has been exploring the different ways of cooking and preserving that are used in our adopted home.

Three years ago we emigrated from Scotland so my husband could follow his farming dream, our son could have a life in the sun and I could develop my painting. Although we are only a few kilometers outside the small city of San Rafael in the Province of Mendoza our neighbourhood is very rural, we are surrounded by fruit orchards and fincas, or small farms.

Our diet here tends to be very seasonal as – with the exception of a few supermarkets in the centre

of town – the shops only stock what is available locally. This can sometimes be frustrating if you are accustomed to the western ideal of everything from everywhere being available anytime, and if, for example, you suddenly fancy a bit of sushi for supper!

I remember being totally bewildered shortly after we arrived when I couldn't find breakfast cereal in the local shops. This is such a staple of most kids' diets in the UK that I couldn't believe it was a luxury product here. I soon realised that most Argentines don't eat breakfast at all and those that do generally only have something very light such as plain toast.

However the seasonality also has definite advantages – the main one being that you really, really appreciate things when you haven't seen or tasted them for a year. In Spring one of the first vegetables to appear is asparagus. In Scotland this is a luxury vegetable, usually flown in from Peru, but here it grows like a weed. Enterprising young boys pick it and sell it in bunches by the side of the road, and you see it stacked up in pyramids at every greengrocer. We love the stuff and eat it almost every day while it is around, and then just when we might be starting to get bored of it, it vanishes from the shops and we start looking out for the arrival of the cherries – the next treat.

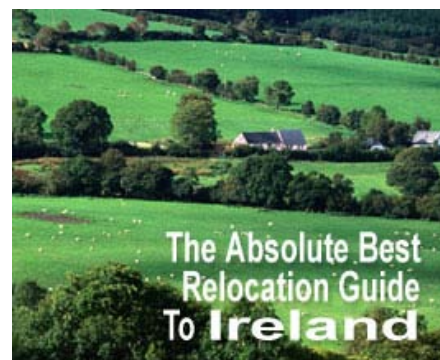
In the UK, fresh food is expensive whereas preserved and processed food is generally cheaper. Here the opposite is true. Within a couple of kilometers of our house we can buy freshly laid eggs and local vegetables and meat for very reasonable prices but I have never seen a ready meal on sale, and tinned or packaged food is relatively costly.

As fruit is the staple crop we are lucky enough to be washed by waves of fruit as it comes into season – after the cherries come the apricots then plums, peaches, nectarines, pears and grapes – all sold by the crate direct from the farms or by the side of the road as well as in the ubiquitous greengrocers.

To cope with all this bounty the local traditions of preserving are still going strong. Before we moved here I had only the haziest notion of what

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simple but time consuming

canning and bottling actually were – an impression mostly gleaned from novels set in rural America! However now, implementing these techniques take up a fair proportion of my summer. In case anyone reading this is as ignorant as I was the process involves peeling and chopping fruit, putting it in jars or bottles with sugar syrup and sterilising the sealed jars by submerging them in boiling water for a long, long time.

It is simple enough but time consuming. I have gradually become lazier and lazier about the

methods I use. At first I was dutifully following the “hot syrup” method which involves heating up the fruit and separately heating a sugar syrup then combining them in hot jars before submerging them in, yes, HOT water. Remember that all this is taking place in the middle of the summer when temperatures can reach the high thirties... Several scalds and sugar burns later I was delighted when a friend told me that all this was unnecessary - that it works just as well if you add the cold fruit to sterilised jars, top them up with cold water and add a few spoonfuls of sugar, then seal them and into the cold water they go. Okay it then takes longer to bring to the boil but the whole process is so much easier – I just wish my friend had mentioned it earlier!

She does all her preserving on a fire outside which is the traditional method. Sadly we don't have a suitable space in the garden to build the right kind of fire and I do mine inside so my kitchen can get a bit sauna-like.



I have vowed never to peel another peach in my life

Last year my well intentioned husband bought one hundred kilos of peaches thinking they were a bargain. Three days of hot and sticky hard labour later we were barely on speaking terms and I vowed never to peel another peach in my life- but I have to say that we did enjoy them in the middle of winter.

The other way of keeping fruit is to make jam and like most housewives here I have a cupboard stocked with jars – cherry, plum, apricot, peach, strawberry. The only fruit I really miss are raspberries, having grown up on my mother's home-made raspberry jam which is simply the best in the world! One fruit I barely knew about before coming here is quince. It is a neglected crop now but quince trees grow all along the roads around us and in Autumn they are covered in gold knobby fruit.

The main thing people make with them is membrillo – literally just quince, or quince cheese. This is made in the same way as jam but boiled for longer. As quince is very high in pectin it eventually sets solidly to make a stiff jelly. This is absolutely delicious served with creamy cheese – a combination which is served as a local dessert – Postre Vigilante.

Many people here have their own vegetable patch. The soil is very fertile but getting things to grow can be tough because this area suffers annually from strong winds in the spring and baking heat in the summer, not to mention various strange viruses and the savage ants that can chew up a delicate seedling in a matter of minutes! Plants need endless watering and a lot of loving care. I have grown salad leaves and tomatoes in pots at our house but I must admit I was a lot more successful at gardening in Scotland when I only had to contend with endless rain and slugs!

The main crop on our finca is alfalfa but last year we also grew vegetables for our own, and our workers' use. I ended up with many crates of them and of course felt duty bound to preserve those that we didn't eat immediately.

Red peppers are fantastic charred in the oven then peeled and simply bottled with nothing added. A local delicacy is aubergine (or eggplant!) escabeche – thinly sliced aubergines blanched in vinegar then bottled with oil and spices. I also bottled huge batches of tomatoes cooked with aubergines and peppers, ending up with shelves of instant sauce for pasta or the base for stews and curries. The thing I made most of was what we call ketchup though it doesn't bear much resemblance to the commercial stuff. This is a thick chunky sauce that my son likes to eat with absolutely everything, which I am delighted about as it is packed with antioxidants.

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As a complete novice in all this I have been collecting recipes and advice from different sources. Fortunately my neighbours – a stalwart collection of lovely boisterous women – are all proud cooks and happy to tell me the ins and outs of the various traditional methods. Unfortunately my Castellano is not as fluent as I would like it to be and I have a habit of thinking I have understood something when I haven't. This has led to unpleasant results such as when I misunderstood our finca worker's instructions for cooking the hare he had given us after shooting it with a catapult. I was sure he recommended soaking it for twelve hours in vinegar but that definitely didn't improve the flavour! The next time he gave us one I cooked it straight and it was much nicer. I felt like a real farmer's wife after that as I had to skin and gut the thing too – not an appetising task for an ex-vegetarian but life here is one long learning curve!

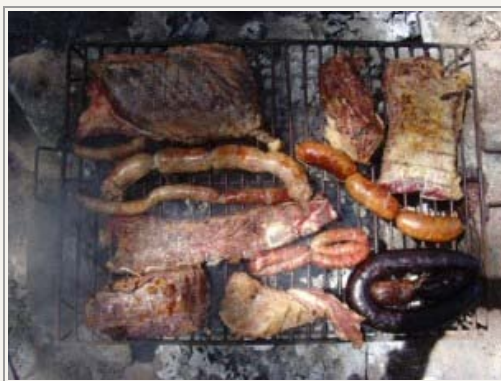
With regard to recipes things are complicated by the fact that everyone has their own particular way of doing things. I was confused for ages about the "correct" way of processing black olives as everyone I asked gave me different advice. We are lucky enough to have two ancient trees in the garden that produce huge succulent olives. After a fair bit of trial and error I discovered the best method is to soak them in brine for several months – that way they stay nice and juicy. The alternative is to layer them in dry salt but then they end up more leathery.

No article about Argentine food is complete without a mention of Dulce de Leche. Literally Milk Jam, this tooth-achingly sweet spread has the consistency of thick cream and is lethal to the waist line. I rarely buy it as it only seems to last a matter of hours in our house. Argentines use it as filler for all sorts of cakes and pastries. I did try making it once – the only recipe I could find said simply: "boil milk for hours, stirring all the time." Unfortunately there was no guidance on how to tell when it was ready so I duly boiled and boiled it and it ended up setting like stone – we had to chip it out of the jars! It still tasted good but it wasn't quite the same.

At the time of this experiment we had a dairy cow at the finca so we were getting several litres of fresh milk daily, which I used to make yoghurt and cheese. The cheese was basic – I made it by setting milk in soft curds with lemon juice or vinegar and then hanging it up to drain in a muslin cloth. The result was bland but tasted very fresh. Marinating it in spiced oil jazzed it up a bit.

If you asked most people to name the first thing they think of when Argentine food is mentioned I expect they would say "meat". It is true that we eat a lot more of it here than we did in Scotland, and it is absolutely, unequivocally, delicious. It is also very easy to cook. An Argentine friend once called steaks fast food and I know what he means. A T-bone or fillet steak costs a fraction of the price it would in the UK or US and it can be cooked in minutes.

In the winter I love to cook my version of Oso Buco which is shin beef on the bone cooked very slowly in red wine and onions. It is the ultimate comfort food. Other Argentine specialities are empanadas and milanesas – small pastries with meat fillings and thin breaded escalopes respectively. I must admit I haven't been too successful in my attempts to cook these and I tend to leave it to the experts. You often see notices outside houses where entrepreneurial housewives make empanadas to order – they are usually sold by the dozen.



A male domain!

Argentine eating habits could be described as conservative and the Sunday Asado (barbeque) with all the family is still very much enshrined in the culture. A full blown asado is a wondrous thing to behold! As we don't have family here we often get together with friends on a Sunday. When I first arrived I thought it must be boring to have the same thing over and over again but now I know better and if for any reason we don't host or attend any asados for a few weeks I start to feel deprived!

Cooking the meat is definitely a male domain and inevitably involves a certain amount of ritual conversation regarding the best kind of wood to create the ideal heat; the particular cuts of meat

being cooked that day; and where the chorizos and morcillas were purchased from. These delicacies are prepared to individual recipes by butchers everywhere – even the tiniest shops have a meat counter. Chorizos are large chunky sausages, usually made with a combination of pork and beef. Morcilla is blood sausage, a bit like British black pudding but softer in texture. Juicy chunks of these are usually served with bread while the rest of the meat is cooking. Homemade chutneys and relishes make a good accompaniment to these, as well as chimichuri – a traditional sauce of oregano, parsley, garlic and spices.

Every Argentine man has his preferred cut of meat to put on the parilla (grill) – a full asado might include fillet; ribs; chinchulin or intestine, which may sound a bit dubious but is appetisingly crispy after slow cooking; matambre, or

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belly meat . An occasional chicken might even make an appearance but beef is definitely the star turn.

Asados are a blissfully easy way of entertaining: you don't have to worry about serving something original – everyone knows what to expect, all the action takes place outside so you don't have to spend time tidying the house, (definitely a big plus in my case!) and guests generally bring a salad or dessert to share. People here tend to have a much more relaxed attitude to time than in the UK and it is not uncommon for an asado that starts at lunchtime to go on until midnight.

Foodie friends have often been curious about the difference in our diet now that we live in Argentina. It certainly hasn't changed completely – we still eat a lot of pasta, curries and salads. We never did eat much processed food although my son used to have the normal addictions to baked beans, fish fingers and peanut butter – all unavailable here. He has learned to do without them! As we live in a land locked area we don't have access to much fish and I do miss that. We do have a more restricted diet than we did before but the quality and freshness of what we eat more than makes up for that.

I don't want to give the impression that I spend my entire life cooking (although it does sometimes feel that way!). I do spend a lot of time in the kitchen but I do so because I love it and find it deeply satisfying to prepare the majority of the things my family eats, and to feel that we are making the most of the lavishly bountiful harvests around us.

About the Author: Kate Kirby is a mother, partner, ardent foodie and artist. Originally from Scotland, she has lived with her family near San Rafael in Argentina for three years. In her former life she worked as a cook, a teacher, a cleaner...anything to keep the wolf from the studio door. For more information on her painting and the art holidays she runs in San Rafael please see her website: www.kate-kirby.com

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International Travel and Skin Cancer

By Robert Tillotson / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) •  [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



A Place in the Sun

International travel usually means more time spent outdoors—and a higher risk of skin cancer.

When trekking to foreign countries, the responsible traveler takes measures to prevent infectious diseases. They update their vaccines, pack mosquito repellent and buy water purification tablets to ward off nasty bugs.

But how many travelers give a thought to skin cancer? When traveling and living abroad, we naturally spend more time outside than we do in everyday life. We walk, sightsee, lounge on beaches and loiter in sidewalk cafes. More time outside means more sun exposure, which can, of course, lead to skin cancer. Specifically, skin

cancer is caused primarily by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun.

People living and traveling at lower latitudes, higher altitudes and in cities, where sun rays bounce off concrete, are at the highest risk. However, skin cancer is a universal concern. Whether traveling in the Eastern Caribbean or Eastern Europe, everyone should take precautions against the sun's damaging rays.

The two most common types of skin cancer — basal cell and squamous cell carcinomas — are highly curable. However, melanoma, the third most common skin cancer, is the most dangerous because it tends to spread throughout the body. While all skin cancers can be fatal, melanoma is the most deadly.

Globally in 2000, more than 200,000 new cases of melanoma were diagnosed and 65,000 melanoma-associated deaths occurred, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the harmful effects of UV radiation, the agency reports.

And, the incidence of melanoma is increasing. For example, between 1972 and 2002 in the U.S., the number of new cases of melanoma increased by 150 percent and the melanoma mortality rate spiked by 44 percent, according to a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) report.

The damaging effects of UV radiation accumulate over the years, and skin cancer is often the result of decades of exposure to the sun, reports the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health Safety (CCOHS). So, a daily habit of protecting your skin from sun exposure is the best way to defend against skin cancer.

Follow these simple tips to help protect yourself from skin cancer:

- Use a sunscreen with an SPF of 30 or higher every day. Apply it 20 minutes before heading outdoors so that it absorbs into the skin before you begin to perspire.
- No matter what SPF you choose, reapply every two hours and after swimming or sweating – even if you're using a so-called "sports" or "water-resistant" sunscreen.
- Don't forget to apply sunscreen to all exposed areas, including the face, ears, feet and hands.
- Use a high-SPF balm on your lips.
- Even if the weather is hot, consider wearing long sleeves, pants and a wide-brimmed hat. Tight-woven fabrics and dark colors provide the most protection.

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- Wear sunglasses that block both UVA and UVB rays to protect your eyes and the skin around them.
- Avoid midday sun and seek the shade – but that doesn't let you off the hook for sunscreen. UV rays still seep under umbrellas and trees.
- Keep in mind that children and teens are particularly at risk for skin cancer, so if you are traveling with kids, make sure they take the precautions above.

Sources: CDC, COOHS, WHO

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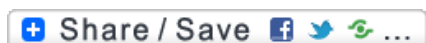
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Learning to Live in Saigon: One Day at a Time

By Eric Thomas Seyler / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



Learning to live in Saigon

I can remember sitting on the tailgate of a truck my dad and I borrowed to move my stuff. I was about to enter into yet another student house, a future of predictable chaos, for however much longer I could manage. He told me then that we could forget about the move and I could go somewhere else. He knew what I thought about this, but I was afraid to make the difficult choice.

It was summer 2008; I had just graduated. I was trying to figure out in which direction the next step was going to take. For the moment, all I wanted was to remain independent, living away from home. Two hours away had been enough for the duration of university, so I decided to stay for another year. It turned out to be a year of unforeseen struggle, bouncing between jobs and

routines that were becoming unfulfilling and detrimental. Then one year almost become two. Feeling discontent with the way I lived at home was difficult in itself; but suffering through my last years at home was crucial in my decision to finally leave my country of birth to [live and work abroad](#).

It became obvious that my university education might not illuminate a pathway for me even before I graduated. For years I ruled out options I thought I wouldn't want to pursue. Doing this seemed to leave very few possibilities that I might actually enjoy. I sometimes wonder if I was an active participant in limiting my future. If anything, though, four years of university taught me how to enjoy learning and how to learn effectively. Those years of intensive study also showed me that the list of people and things I thought I enjoyed was getting smaller.

At first, I brushed this off as a fact of life and then chalked it up to part of growing-up. I began to panic when I realized that what I really wanted to do would not earn a living, at least not initially. It was extremely frustrating to think that I couldn't be independent and aspire to be what I wanted, without being fiscally challenged. I loathed the idea of spending all of my time making money, just so I could spend that money. I needed a plan.

It was Christmas 2009; I was starting to feel like I was getting into a dangerous rut. I was not enjoying work. It wasn't exercising my skills. My thoughts returned to wondering about how living and working abroad could open up different avenues for me. It had already been more than a year since I applied to teach English in Japan. My interest to go abroad had dwindled a bit and during that time my sister and her boyfriend travelled to live and work in Viet Nam. They shared adventures I wish I could have partaken in and the comparative boredom of next three months started within me again what I thought I had almost lost; a desire to explore and understand, that which is not known; the ability to dream. I had hesitated long enough. I decided to join them. I thought I was going because I needed a job, because I needed to make money, because I thought I would have the lifestyle that would afford me the time I needed to become what I wanted. This is the closest I have ever been to making it happen and everyday my experiences in this country stare me in the face, forcing me to question my motives for coming.

Viet Nam quickly earned a special place in my heart because it represents a long list of firsts. I left for Ho Chi Minh City in the Lunar New Year of 2010, never having lived in a large city, that is, a city of much more than 100,000 inhabitants. Considering that I grew up in a town of less than 5,000, Saigon, as many people still call it, is

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absolutely huge by my standards and consists of anywhere between 8 and 10 million people. Perhaps more. My stay in Viet Nam has also been reason for my very first flight on an airplane, my first adventure off the North American continent and my first teaching position at any school. Not surprisingly, Viet Nam has also been the first place I have felt like a bit of an outsider. That being said, culture shock wasn't and still isn't much a concern for me; but I feel my experiences here have already changed my life and the person I am becoming.



A sea of motorbikes, four-wheeled vehicles and bicycles

wheeled vehicle much further than a hundred meters, maybe a little odd for a boy growing up in the Canadian countryside; still, it was as I expected once my confidence grew; pure joy. Among the first of what were many sublime realizations that this country stirred within me; there were many things to fall in love with in Viet Nam.

I can remember staring out the window like a child at a rainbow during the taxi-ride from the airport to my hotel. Seeing all the colours of the city at once, in awe and wonderment, exploded my imagination. I thought to myself, there is more to see in this city than I could have ever known. This is the most interesting city in the world. This memory is still as vivid as the day it was created more than a year later and within an hour of being in Saigon I was hooked. The colours, the sounds, the smells, the beautiful people and the delicious food, I couldn't ask for more. Oh, well perhaps one more thing: a steady influx of money into a new bank account. Excellent. After three months, this new life of mine was starting to feel very good. I kept my nose to grindstone for this time and seeing how my colleagues felt after living here for a number of years, I began to understand their reasons for never leaving. They enjoyed their lives. I could often see the stress that work caused, but the ends more than justified the means for them. A teacher's salary can easily provide an upper class lifestyle and they made sure to take advantage of every free minute they had. However, under the candy coating of the expat life laid hidden dangers. Some of these dangers were things to be weary of for all people living in Saigon, but as I discovered, most reveal themselves only to expats and other foreign visitors.



Saigon - a place where dreams can come true

Saigon is a city with a recognizable pulse, but at times it can be somewhat erratic. It takes time to adjust to the new highs and lows it has to offer and I've been doing so the best way I know how, for this is surely a place where your maladaptive character traits can get you hurt in more ways than one. I know. This city can feel manic-depressive and sometimes I feel it has brought out the worst in me. Sometimes I feel like it can see right into me. Is it so strange that after six months of fortune and despair that I was and still am looking for a deeper meaning in my being here? You have to see this city to believe what I want to tell you.

Before ever exploring the world as a traveller and discovering Viet Nam as a tourist, I was thrust into the fray, the bosom of a foreign society, to undergo a trial by fire like I had never experienced. After two weeks at the new job I was driving myself on a rented motorbike from Phu My Hung in District 7, where I lived and held a company office, to District 6, where I taught children at a government run public school. The traffic in Saigon is absolutely terrifying. A sea of motorbikes speckled by four-wheeled vehicles and bicycles as well, cover the streets on their way to and from work. It's important to have nerves of steel while operating a motorbike in busy traffic. Go with the flow or be one in the flock. This was the first time I had driven a two-

Viet Nam can easily show itself to be a hidden gem and a place where dreams have the very real possibility of coming true. Before coming here I was making attempts at becoming a responsible young adult, perhaps a few years late, but nonetheless, independence and professionalism were important to me. Saigon rekindled my love affair with frivolous activities. I don't know if it's because my money goes further in this country, or because as a young man I felt more susceptible to the promises of the night, or if I'm escaping from, or pursuing something in my subconscious; regardless, somehow my steps towards becoming a mature adult regressed in the first six months of my stay, if just a little.

Saigon is a city with a recognizable pulse, but at times it can be somewhat erratic. It takes time to adjust to the new highs and lows it has to offer and I've been doing so the best way I know how, for this is surely a place where your maladaptive character traits can get you hurt in more ways than one. I know. This city can feel manic-depressive and sometimes I feel it has brought out the worst in me. Sometimes I feel like it can see right into me. Is it so strange that after six months of fortune and despair that I was and still am looking for a deeper meaning in my being here? You have to see this city to believe what I want to tell you.

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In the year I have been in Viet Nam, nearly all of my time was spent in this city. When I look at Saigon, I have strange feelings of always wanting to have lived here. I never thought about living here. I wanted to live in Japan. It is somewhat of a mystery to me because I cannot explain the feelings I have developed for this country and this city. And that makes my being here even more moving. If you were ever someone that couldn't stop dreaming about a place you've never been, Viet Nam might be the place you were always dreaming about.

My experience of Viet Nam would not have been the same without living amongst its nationals. To live a normal life in a different country changed the way I view and feel about certain things. The way I think about wealth, money, possessions and my ultimate happiness have been irrevocably altered. I have gone through a transformation and I owe it all to events that transpired here, away from home, where a dream turned into a nightmare and then a dream once more. In coming to Viet Nam I had to change my life and as I was settling into a new kind of lifestyle, not entirely sure I was enjoying it; events that happened next ensured that it wouldn't last.

You really can't be too prepared for a wrongful termination of your employment. It's important to keep high spirits when you're far away from home though. Undoubtedly, losing my job after six months was discouraging and I have not been so quick to trust business owners and others since; I've managed to survive though. Living outside of the foreigner compound of Phu My Hung rejuvenated my image of what life in Viet Nam could be. Suddenly, it was not about affordable luxury. It was about a soulful mediocrity. It was about living like the common man, both modestly and happily. It was beautiful. There were times when I struggled to make ends meet; even so, I was still able to find happiness with what was sometimes very little. I turned this uncomfortable period into a test of character and I came out enjoying myself even more than before. It was an experience as raw and real as I could have hoped for. Not everyone wants to live a life this way. I started to think that this was the real reason I came. If anything shocked me so much about this place, it was only how rich and evocative the culture really is; there has also never been a place where the passing of time has confused me more than in Viet Nam.

Some days I forget where I am. In Saigon, when I wanted to do something, there were countless things to prevent anything from happening in a timely fashion. When you don't know where things are, it takes time to locate them. When you can't simply ask someone, it takes even longer. And of course, when you can't get there by means that are conventional to you, then the issue of going anywhere or doing anything can easily seem like too much of a headache. This was not how I was used to living my life. I am a North American. I understand speed and efficiency and I understand the urgency with which we plan years ahead for our entire lives. Sometimes I feel unable to behave this way in Saigon. You could live in this city for ten years and still not know anything. I have met people of which this is true, yet I still feel less responsibility in a city where I will always be regarded as a foreigner.

I quickly learned not to struggle against the pace of things here. You need to let everything happen around you. The city lives in such a way that if you try to change its energy to suit your needs, it will hurt you. You need to change for the city. I think most of those who are interested in travelling and perhaps living or working abroad for extended periods in a city like this, understand what is required of them. An open-mind and a generous heart are good things to start with.

When was the last time you felt that time move so differently? I expect some of you to be thinking about the last time you fell in love. One year can be a long time to live anywhere; but only when you are truly at peace do I feel like time seems to have no effect, or that its effect becomes insignificant. Then you may find that time is something of which you lose track.

At the end of the day, when all I want to do is sit the shade and have a beer I often think about the poverty that is so overt, but also how romantic a notion it is to be so carefree in such a beautiful part of the world. Everywhere I look I see scenes of people in need contrast with scenes of people holding hands and couples on motorbikes. One is usually holding on for their life but it's says to me, that not only are there tones of people living here, but also that you don't have to be lonely when living in Saigon. Beyond all the craziness that this city seems to thrive on there is an inspiring feeling of togetherness. Despite the piles of trash that often fill all unused space, despite the political alignment of this country, this city has never made me feel unwelcome and I've never been somewhere that has made me feel better about myself. Whether it is because I helped children to learn, was generous to someone in need, or just smiled frequently, I feel as though these gestures were taken more seriously here. In Viet Nam I see school kids signing in the streets. When I see happiness in the smiles of children who I know live lives less privileged than mine, it makes me wonder if a life of little expectation is as enlightening as I hope. This makes me never want to leave.

The circumstances that lead to my leaving are still things that I think about. If I had been just a little more content with where I was living and what I was doing at the time, I may not have ever gone on the journey I had always dreamed about. I can remember how long it took to muster the courage, to say goodbye to the people and places that you knew for so long, not because you knew you would never return, but because you knew you would miss

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them dearly.

I expect the same feelings of apprehension to plague me once more when it's finally time for me to return home. I am certainly not in a hurry to do so. The day when I go home is not a time that I think about. But Saigon is the only other place I've seemed to continue dreaming about while still living there. This is a city where the sights and sounds are colourful and loud. This is a city where afternoon naps transport you to a different time and place. This is a city where strangers sit side-by-side and eat with gusto. This is a city where a smile can go further than most are willing to imagine. This is a city where I can work a little, enjoy a lot and write all the time. This is my dream. Here, I can escape to a place I thought was only in my mind. It's a place I used to think about as a child.

I can't remember the last time I felt so humbled by everything. I can't remember ever seeing so much beauty, in so many unlikely places. I've seen and felt things here that have left me with memories that will last a lifetime, of this, I am sure. Sometimes I am brought to the brink of tears, because I'm filled with feelings of such simple freedom, joy, and peace. I see these feelings in the people here. These are feelings I get when I am alone with nature, witnessing the natural beauty of the world. These are feelings I get when I gaze at the stars with intrigue and bewilderment. These are feelings I often get when I am in Saigon. If ever I forgot how to live my life, being in Viet Nam has taught me how to live again. The next step has been laid.

Even though my concept of time is challenged by this place and I feel like I can only live a day at a time, I wouldn't have it any other way because my life has finally slowed down enough to enjoy. And that makes me smile. You'll know when you're beginning to really feel at home because your reason for staying becomes so different from the reason you came. It's on these days when I realize that my journey has just begun.



Thomas Seyler

About the Author – Aspiring writer and Photographer, Eric spent nearly 20 years in a small southwestern town in Ontario Canada, privileged with panoramic views of wilderness at its most serene. A student of history and anthropology during his years at university, he has since earned a degree in teaching for English as a second language and currently lives and works in Vietnam. He claims this country has become a second home and allows him the time he needs to follow his dreams.

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International Moving To and From Chicago Area!

By Phyllis Davis / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



Goodbye Chicago! Goodbye Cubbies!

Is it time for you to leave Chicago and the upper Midwest and move to your EscapeArtist dream home on a sunny beach somewhere in the world? Or, would you like to move an employee or your entire company from Illinois to other places around the US, or around the world?

If you're moving out of the [great city of Chicago](#) or its surrounding areas, or 'to or from' exotic ports throughout the world, then EscapeArtist has the perfect solution to help you make your move from 'door to door,' 'port to port' and also 'warehouse to port.'

If you knew how easy it is to schedule a move, and how affordable it can be to relocate, your

plans for moving can come together in a matter of DAYS instead of months or years.

Research indicates that [people are 'on the move'](#) in record numbers:

- Professional and reputable moving companies are seeing an increased demand for their services according to *Political News and Views* (August 10, 2010), "With the pressures of life these days, statistical figures report that close to [forty-three million people in the US relocate per annum.](#)"
- Companies and businesses are also continuing their upward trend for relocating their valuable employees. From a corporate relocation specialist, Worldwide ERC, in 2009, their member-company's domestic relocation costs [exceeded \\$25 billion for corporate relocations.](#) Now THAT'S a lot of boxes!

[Midwest-International Shipping](#) has been moving Chicago families and businesses locally and internationally since 1994. They've moved people from Chicago's own trendy Lincoln Park neighborhood near Chicago's Gold Coast to homes around the world. They've also moved company's employees from Chicago to Europe, Central and South America and other global locations. Midwest-International offers their many years of moving experience to make their move a relaxed and enjoyable experience for their valued customers.

*The process for learning about Midwest-International's moving services is as easy as catching an infield pop fly. After you've contacted Midwest-International, they arrange a time for you to speak with one of their Relocation Specialists to determine your needs and specifications. After that, they'll discuss which of their moving services would best fit your relocation needs. Yes, **IT'S THAT SIMPLE.***

Not only does Midwest-International move your valuable possessions, but they also offer:

- [Custom assistance with their own Relocation Specialists to educate you about your move and answer any questions you may have throughout your entire moving process](#)
- [An International shipping network to help you move locally or globally by truck, air or sea shipping services, worldwide.](#)
- Packing and storage services that includes tagging, crating and padding as well as free storage for up to one month (low monthly rates thereafter), in clean, climate controlled storage areas
- Available insurance as an added value to create a relaxed and stress-free move
- A 'free online quote form' for receiving timely and competitive rates for their moving services.
- A 'moving truck rental service' that can take your belongs to a new destination, or from 'door to port' or 'warehouse to port' safely yourself if you choose that option.

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Midwest-International may be based in Chicago, but they offer a world-wide network of partners that provide best-destination services in the moving industry. When planning global moves for their customers, they offer a variety of capabilities for providing a full range of expedited transportations services:

- Air freight services when timing is crucial
- Loading goods into a full or partial shipping container or into lift van crates, then into a container for sea shipping
- Trucking and transport services for over-the-road moves.

Since they provide their clients their own personal Relocation Specialists that help with every aspect of their move, they deservedly pride themselves for having no 'middle men' or 'unaffiliated agents' in their freight shipping system as they deal directly with airlines, sea worthy shipping companies, and trucking companies. This direct line of communication with their suppliers increases customer satisfaction for their services, and reduces the overall costs to their clients.

Midwest-International remains **compliant with the ever-evolving rules and regulations** for shipping commodities, and offers hands-on service for full document creation for their client's customs documents, packing lists, export declarations and bill of lading forms. When shipping your goods internationally, Midwest-International works with knowledgeable international agents who make certain you receive your belongings quickly and efficiently on your behalf.

Midwest-International, part of the MIS family of company, has professional affiliations with American Moving and Storage Association, Illinois Movers & Warehousemen's Association, and the Better Business Bureau (BBB) Online.

Customers are ardent about their positive experiences with Midwest-International Shipping:

"Wanted to let you know that we had a very enjoyable experience and will recommend your company to everyone we know! Please thank our wonderful crew for their kindness and the professional job in this stressful time. Guys where on time, both in Chicago and in Canada. A big thank you we really save money on this move. Again, thank you guys." – by Jim and Marianne Quebec, Canada.

"I knew what I wanted when I called. The sales person was fast took care of every question that I had. Their shipping is amazing. I called up late on Monday and was ready by Friday of the same week." – Randall – San Diego CA

"I want to let you know that after 15 years of being professionally moved, the team you sent us was the most professional, courteous and helpful, well done. Relocating our office from Wisconsin to France was a big project for our company. We still can't believe that it was all done within 1 week. We are strongly recommended to any company that consider international relocating." – by Fabian Jacob, Paris

If you're ready to "make your Big Move" or just move across town, contact [Midwest-International Shipping Company](#) and let them explain your moving and shipping options for truck, air, or shipping services.

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Shopping Overseas: Everyone loves a Bargain

By Billy and Akaisha Kaderli / Apr 11 • Categorized as [Living Overseas](#) • [Download Print Friendly PDF](#)



Akaisha Kaderli – getting the price right

I'm a world traveler and I'm here to help.

Grown adults from the U.S. and Canada can find themselves shaking in their boots, confused, frustrated, or even angry when it comes to bargaining for goods in foreign countries. It's safe to say that most Anglos find it distasteful, yet bargaining is inherent in many cultures around the world. Native peoples have developed this communication skill for centuries, exchanging live chickens for bags of rice, avocados or woven cloth.

Taught how to sell by their parents or an older sibling, it is a common event to see children out on the streets or in vendor stalls in Mexico,

Guatemala, Thailand, Vietnam, Myanmar, China and dozens of other countries all around the globe.

So why do lots of tourists shy away from wrangling over the price of their souvenirs? Or expats find themselves overpaying for goods and services in their newfound retirement paradise? Besides the fact that there is a large gulf between cultures on this subject, it is my opinion that Americans and Canadians do not understand the value of the choreography between buyer and seller.

Let's Dance

One thing that countries in Asia, Mexico and Central America share in common that North America has very little of, is the expectation to bargain for the price of goods and services. Bargaining, a dance between buyer and seller is integral in these cultures. It is through this negotiation on the terms of an exchange that both participants learn a great deal about the other person.

Is the party on the other end of the deal a fool? Do they know value when they see it? Are they informed about their product? Are they arrogant and abusive? Can they be pushed around? Are they decisive? What about having a sense of humor, or a balanced sense of generosity? Do they show respect and honesty?

This exchange of information goes on underneath the dickering over price, and most North Americans find it unsavory. 'I want a price and I want it marked. Fair and the same for everyone' they say, as a way to explain their sense of equal justice. People from this culture prefer an obvious price and then be able to make up their mind whether to purchase it then, or wait until the item goes on sale. There is no messy emotional entanglement in this exchange; in fact, there is no 'relationship' involved at all. It is the decision of a single person: 'here it is, at this price, do I want it or not?'

However, personal interaction is an important ingredient in bargaining cultures, and by eliminating this unspoken, under-the-surface dialogue, there would no longer be the dance. You would be ripping out of them an inbuilt part of their civilization that allows them to peer inside of your person. It's an accepted form of communication for them. The thing is, [most tourists](#) and Expats don't know that.

But I'm no good at this...

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Dickering over price can trigger anxieties in those who feel incompetent in this skill. Nothing can be more aggravating than thinking you are being taken advantage of, akin to dealing with a smarmy used car salesman. If you do not know local pricing or know little about the product you want to purchase, then you could be overpaying. Lack of trust or a sense of lack of control could plague you. But wait! There's hope.



You're not in Kansas anymore

Bargaining How To's

You're not in Kansas anymore. The best way to meet the challenge of bargaining is to know the local pricing of something. Just because the cost of a similar necklace, weaving, bedspread or house rental in New York City, Toronto or San Francisco is 'X,' you will be going into this situation at a distinct disadvantage if you think the first price offered to you is the best deal you have ever heard. That amount in Dallas would be a steal – the thing is, *you are not IN Dallas.* You are dealing with a completely different financial economy and pricing structure.

The asking price is always high, and reflects an out-of-the-ballpark amount that the seller dreams to receive. To begin the bargaining process, offer

him one-third of this initial figure. To the uninitiated, that paltry amount might seem insulting. And if you compare that price to the prices in Miami, it would be. But the truth is, experienced buyers and sellers realize that the counter offer is equally ridiculous. The real price lies somewhere in the middle. The dance has begun.

Those who refuse to bargain while living or visiting in these cultures – completely unaware of what the neighborhood pricing is – place themselves and other tourists at a financial disadvantage. Because they are willing to pay 3, 5, even 10 times or more than anyone in the vicinity would ever pay, vendors who make their living by selling begin to automatically assume that all tourists are rich; money is due to them and is simply there to be grabbed. It is easy to think *'well, it's just a few bucks and they really need it more than I do,'* but that attitude will put you in a weak purchasing position and botches the balance between you.

Prepare yourself by checking around locally to find the cost for similar items so you know what you are talking about. This will give you the confidence and sense of fairness you need to stand firm on the price you want to pay. Remember, the more items you buy, the better price you should get. Quantity equals bigger discount.

Once while living in Thailand I commissioned my seamstress to make half-a-dozen reversible Chinese silk robes. On the initial deal, I gave her a drawing and discussed price for one robe. After we agreed on the timeline and the amount, I told her I would like five more robes made, just like this one. Could I get a discount for ordering a total of six? Smiling, she realized that she had several weeks worth of work being offered to her and would be bringing in a larger amount of money to her home, and she gladly marked my price down even further. We both received what we wanted. Guaranteed work mattered to her, and price mattered to me.

Bargain for living quarters. Living in a foreign country on a long term stay or as your retirement destination, opens up the ability to also bargain for your rental amount. Renting a hotel room, an apartment or a home from a local can present the opportunity for better pricing if you like to negotiate. Offer to stay for a longer period, pay the rent a couple of months in advance (get a receipt), or offer to make small repairs yourself. This shows the landlord that you are making a good faith deal, and he will likely offer you a better price. Not only are you helping yourself with this transaction, you are also keeping costs in your area down for others who may choose to live there. It's a win-win for everyone. He gets guaranteed income for a certain length of time, and you get a more affordable rent.

Be willing to leave the deal. To perform a negotiation well, you have to be willing to walk away. Vendors have been selling their wares since they have been 6 or 7 years old. They have learned to read both facial expressions and body language, and many of them are persistent. You might think that you are dealing with a young girl or boy, but they are seasoned and skilled at what they do. They know the value of their goods and can read you and your wallet well.

You might want something terribly, *but you have to be willing to leave the deal.* If the vendor calls you back, then the price you offered is considered fair – or at least workable. Vendors will not sell at a loss, so if he or she holds firm even after you have left, then you have found his bottom price. Treat it as valuable information. You can always go back tomorrow and open the business deal again.



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Don't engage unless you are serious. This isn't a game. Vendors value their time too and do not take kindly to your wasting it. Do not seriously engage the bargaining process until you are ready to purchase. If you are on your fact-finding mission of finding local pricing, indicate such to them. Say things like 'I am just looking today, thank you' or 'I'm curious, for example, what would this cost, if I wanted to buy it?' This lets them know that today is not your purchasing day and they will not rev themselves up for deal making. They will respect you for your honesty, and will save their energy for another customer.

If you begin the financial dialogue but are not sincere, you have treated him without courtesy, and have sullied that relationship. You can fully expect to be verbally reprimanded or rebuffed.



Even if you are a horrible haggler make an effort or lose respect

Keeping the Financial Ecology Balanced

Indigenous people honor and value the skill of bargaining, and they know what something is worth. Even if they make faces or have drama with their hands up in the air, it's all part of the play. If money is thrown at them due to what we might perceive as compassion, the native finds himself in the curious position of wanting and needing the money you have, and disliking you for tossing it around so carelessly. He also dislikes himself for having taken your money without the expected bargaining process, and a disrespectful and distasteful posture often develops between the two cultures.

He takes pride in earning the price he receives. How can an Indigenous person respect someone

who does not know proper value when they see it and simply casts money away like that?

Billy and I call this exchange between vendor and purchaser, *financial ecology*. It has been our experience that if this interchange becomes unbalanced, emotional attitudes on both sides sour. That is why so many tourist destinations become rip-off locations, because the authenticity between the two parties has been lost.

Few North Americans understand this tradition and sequence of events.

Even if you feel that you are a horrible haggler, you must make an effort or there will be no respect given to you. You will have placed a neon sign on you saying you are an easy target, and unscrupulous vendors begin to congregate into the area because word has gotten out that it's a 'gravy train' at that location.

So the next time you find yourself in a bargaining situation, take heart! Have fun! Implement the suggestions I have made above, arm yourself with knowledge of local pricing and *go shopping!*

About the authors: Billy and Akasha Kaderli left their fast-track lives at the age of 38 and started traveling the world. After two decades of on-the-road-experience, they share how you, too, can enjoy exotic travel for less than you think. To learn more about world travel and how to become financially independent, visit their website, www.RetireEarlyLifestyle.com

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