

Engaging Yourself in a New Environment

Transition is normal and predictable. People of all cultures have similar experiences and our behaviors and responses are similar as well. How we define, make sense of, and integrate our experiences, determines the success of our transition. It may be difficult to imagine it now, but we can actually thrive through transition and emerge as stronger and more resilient people.

Before moving . . .



- We have a sense of belonging, being included in a group. We have established reputations and social positions. Being known to friends is comfortable and comforting.
- We are engaged in commitments to various activities. There's a great feeling in being responsive and responsible and being a friend to others.
- We experience intimacy in our relationships, feeling affirmed, safe and secure.

(The transition period lasts from when we depart until we figuratively “unpack our minds.”)

While we're moving . . .

- We are facing the unknown, having no social status, no structure in our lives, and feeling “clueless” and confused. We become “born” when we step off the plane. Being known and knowing others begins anew.
- We experience chaos, our problems feel exaggerated and our behaviors are out-of-proportion to the situation. This is when many misunderstandings occur and we're often overwhelmed with feelings of isolation.
- We endure anxiety, fear, and uncertainty related to daily life and an onslaught of new responsibilities. There may be a great deal of emotional instability, grief, and disappointment and frustration with unmet expectations.



During that first year . . .



- We are feeling like we're standing on the sidelines of all social circles, just trying to survive on superficial relationships. With tentative acceptance we feel uncertain of our placement and value to others so we easily misinterpret behaviors and signals.
- During this time we are busy introducing ourselves to others. Risk-taking is positive and negative as we find we must be the ones to initiate relationships and search for a mentor. It's a time for learning to trust others.
- We are feeling vulnerable and both our sense of self-esteem and independence suffers. There is a loss of continuity with the past, what is known and comfortable and we have mixed feelings about our new surroundings. We find ourselves grieving over what we've left behind, yet joyful and excited about new experiences.

Reasons why women may struggle with adjustment . . .

1. Some women **choose not to adjust**. Some have come kicking and screaming and refusing to make this new place home. Others display compliance but are inwardly rebellious, some even feign acceptance but harbor bitterness in their hearts. Whether overtly or covertly, these women hold their family's happiness hostage as they continually complain about their new location and undermine any chance of making it home.
2. Some women simply **don't know much** about their new cultural surroundings. It's not that they're opposed to it, it's just not having much information and the understanding that follows. These women just need a little nudge to develop a framework of the culture and learn it by living it. Reading books, searching the Internet, asking questions are helpful ways to become informed.
3. Some women **don't like** the new culture. They have enough information, but they simply don't like it. It's uncomfortable, irritating and difficult to accept.
4. Some women are **afraid of being disloyal** to own culture. They believe that by adjusting to the new culture and enjoying it, that somehow they betray their own culture. They are tentative about trying new things and avoid opportunities that may tempt them to like it.
5. **Personality characteristics** play a large factor. Women who are by nature more easy-going, may find it less difficult to adjust. Women who struggle with wanting to be in control and keeping life organized may find the adjustment challenging.
6. Some women don't adjust well to their new environment because they **didn't leave well** from their last location. They may be carrying "excess baggage" in relation to lack of closure, unresolved hurts, or other issues that tug at their mental and emotional selves.



Are you interested in being one of the women who adjust well?

Here are some simple suggestions provided by Dr. Max Raines and Dr. Dave Pollock (of Interaction International) in the ADAPT Model.

- A**ctive commitment. Tell yourself "*This is where I live now.*" Accept it and get involved. Invest yourself in your local and expat community.
- D**evelop a support system. Find friends and people who will help you learn and adjust to the culture. Become familiar with your husband's work place and your children's school. Get involved in a church that will be loving and supportive.
- A**djust your expectations to be positive and realistic. Be gracious to yourself and others. Recognize that adjustment takes time and be patient.
- P**rioritize your goals. It's easy to get overwhelmed by other people's requests. Pace yourself and choose what is most important to you and your family.
- T**ranspose your identity. Be yourself and be open to keep learning more about yourself in the process.

Seasoned expat women will recommend that you find a mentor. A mentor should be someone who will introduce the culture to you and introduce you to the culture. If you leave mentoring to chance, you may allow the most disgruntled people to give you their input and negatively color your perspective. Be purposeful and thoughtful in choosing your mentor.

Resources to Help You

Dalat International School is eager and willing to help you adjust. Talk to your child's teacher or your child's school counselor about ways you can get connected. The school has a wonderfully active, energetic and enthusiastic **Parent Teacher Organization (PTO)**. By becoming involved in PTO, you'll build new friendships and find avenues to use your gifts and talents. There are many opportunities to connect at school – room moms, lunch recess duty, special activities, fund-raisers, and more. Not only will you find fun ways to occupy your time, you'll get to hang around your kids at the same time!

The school is an integral part of a larger community. All school staff attend various churches in Penang and are active in outreach groups, charitable and relief projects, worship teams, teaching Sunday School and leading youth groups. You may find a church group that is loving and supportive and can help your family adjust to all the new variables you've encountered. You'll find opportunities to get involved in Bible study, marriage and parenting groups, even scrapbooking or exercising! **Penang International Church** (www.pic.ms) is designed for internationals in the area. Its website states that it "longs to connect internationals with God, through Jesus Christ. If you live here or are moving to Penang, then we may be a great place to find support, friendship, growth, significance and faith."

The **International Women's Association (IWA)** of Penang is a fantastic way to network with other expat women. The IWA has a monthly newsletter, monthly Newcomers Meetings, and a wide array of special activities, events, clubs, and fund-raisers. You will find the IWA to be an excellent source of finding relocation information that will help you set up your home and adjust to daily tasks from groceries to transportation. The IWA [Penang Pointers](#) book is a wonderful directory of goods and services used and trusted by expats.

For Your Children

Teachers, counselors and administrators at Dalat International School work with your children to help them adjust to the school and to our unique community. The school counselors host orientation for middle and high school students and New Kids Groups at various grade levels. Elementary children will receive welcome booklets and are paired up with a "buddy." ***If you have concerns that you would like the school to be aware of, please do not hesitate to let us know.*** You may talk to your child's teacher, school counselor or principal.

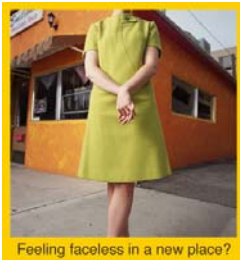
Before your children leave Dalat International School, we help prepare them for the transition by providing a number of "farewelling" activities. Depending on the grade level, children may create autographed T-shirts, picture frames or pillow cases. Elementary children meet with the school counselor to talk about their thoughts and feelings about moving and record them in a little booklet. Middle school students receive a workbook and process through thoughts, feelings and concerns in a group. High school students have the option to receive a workbook which they may complete on their own. The guidance department prepares a two-day seminar for seniors in February with workshops and guest speakers on topics such as the pro's and con's of being a TCK, leaving well, relationships, grief and forgiveness, identifying values, and a variety of aspects of college life. Students participate in a number of interactive games and activities and have the opportunity to ask questions to a panel of staff TCK's.



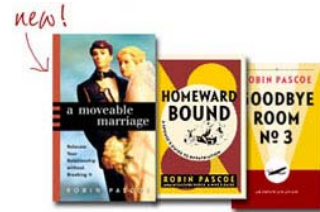
Websites for Expatriates

There are *thousands* of websites that have been created to assist expatriates around the globe. Some sites focus on specific nationalities or destinations while others concentrate on aspects of daily life. Many of these sites are run on a voluntary basis, offering good insight into life abroad with helpful articles and links to useful sites. Some sites are sponsored by organizations or affiliated with companies that have an agenda to promote and products to persuade you to purchase, so be prepared for a biased view.

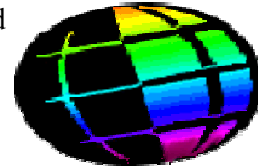
The counseling staff at Dalat International School has done some research for you and has some sites they found worthwhile. On the following pages you will find the addresses and short descriptions of these sites.



Expat Expert (<http://www.expertexpert.com>) is an attractive, easy-to-navigate site with solid information. The site hosts the Reading Room with well-written book abstracts and personal stories. You can chat with other expats and be informed of special presentations in your area.



TCK World (<http://www.tckworld.com/>) provides articles, interviews, and resources on being a Third Culture Kid (TCK). The site offers an explanation of TCK's and why returning to their homeland can be so difficult. Information is posted on events and gatherings. You will find helpful advice for organizations and parents in providing the best care for their TCK's.



This comprehensive site (<http://www.branchor.com>) from Beverly Roman, publisher and

presenter who specializes in handbooks and advice for expatriates, is especially helpful for North-Americans with children. The site includes a culture quiz, list of top 10 relocation concerns, and a catalog of helpful books, workbooks and newsletters.



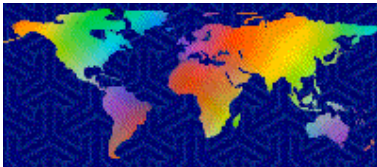
A CONSULTANCY SERVING THE INTERNATIONAL EXPATRIATE AND REPATRIATE COMMUNITY

This site (<http://www.transition-dynamics.com>) provides links and contact information for the internationally mobile. It offers loads of first-hand accounts on expatriate issues and repatriation. It showcases a video on going home and *The Complete Guide to Working Overseas* is available. (Bobbie Schaetti, Transition Dynamic's director is on the Woman Abroad Advisory Board.)

EscapeArtist.com

| HOME | JOBS OVERSEAS | LIVING OVERSEAS | COUNTRY PROFILES | ARTICLES | EBOOKS | OUR MAGAZINE | OFFSHORE | TRAVEL |
| INTERNATIONAL MARKETPLACE | INTERNATIONAL REAL ESTATE | BOATS BARGES & YACHTS | OVERSEAS RETIREMENT | EMBASSIES |

Escape Artist (<http://www.escapeartist.com>) is a comprehensive site, loaded with information. There is a directory of reference material for international living, conversion engines, search tools, links to other expat websites, even magazine subscriptions.



Expats Forum (<http://www.expatform.com>) presents country-specific chat opportunities, cost-of-living indices, bookstore with practical guides, even a link to a language translator.

tales from a small planet

Tales from a Small Planet's mission is to enrich and share the experience of living abroad through literature, humor and the arts, as well as by providing information and education on what it is really like to live in a foreign country and how to cope with the challenges that may come along. This site (http://www.talesmag.com/tales/tales_index.shtml) imparts poetry, book reviews, even postcard clips of living life abroad.



Expats Exchange (<http://www.expatexchange.com/index.cfm>) provides moving and relocation guides, banking and finances, rental information, clubs and organizations, job and volunteer opportunities.

Expats World (<http://expatworld.net>) is an electronic newsletter published every month.

EXPAT WORLD

News, views, reviews, tips and tricks come at a price of \$30 for a year subscription.

expat-moms.com

This site (<http://www.expat-moms.com>) is primarily a list of links to helpful sites for setting up a home in a new location, to share news, ideas and get published.

LIVING ABROAD

The World Online

[intranet] [home]

This site (<http://www.livingabroad.com>) claims to have the most comprehensive online country information and tools for international assignments. It offers information about visas, work permits, security, housing, insurance, international schools, taxation, everyday life, getting around and relocation services by country.

NEWCOMERS CLUB

Worldwide Directory

Newcomers Club (<http://www.newcomersclub.com/my.html>) is an excellent source of information on clubs for anyone who is new in town and wants to get out and make friends.



Associated with the magazine by the same name, this site (<http://www.transitionsabroad.com>) offers an array of articles and reports about working, studying and living abroad.



directory of the world's embassies.

This site (<http://www.embassyworld.com>) hosts a

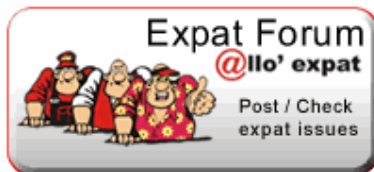
Ori and Ricki (<http://www.ori-and-ricki.net/english.html>) is a website designed for expat kids and their parents with suggestions for recommended reading and other resources.



Websites Specific to Malaysia



Expatriot KL (<http://www.expatriot.com>) is a great site for information about working and living in Malaysia. It includes promotional spots about special restaurant, hotel, and vacation packages in the area. The site also offers a free subscription to *The Expatriot* magazine.



Expatriot Forum (<http://www.alloexpat.com/index.htm>) is a discussion forum for expats living in Malaysia. Topics range from business and entertainment to tourism.

Websites provide you with easy-to-access information, but are ***no substitute for real people*** in your current situation. The most valuable advice you may find is from people who've gone before you – in your company, with your agency, or in your children's school. Don't be timid – ask lots of questions. You'll be pleasantly surprised how willing they are to help!