

Most of us who travel or work abroad have to deal with managing personal relationships. People who travel are interesting; they are intellectually vibrant, and they tend to fall in love. Countless couples have met through travel—they are kindred souls with a passion for discovery. This article provides you a list of basic ideas on how to deal with career planning while managing your personal relationships—from being single, to having a family with children. The ideas here are suggestions to deal with typical career-relationship problems. Your specific circumstance may warrant a different approach.

- **Couples and cross-cultural integration:** Building cross-cultural skills is important for your international career. The task of integrating into another culture is generally easier when you travel alone. A lone traveller will find it easier to make friends and be invited into the homes of local families. A lone traveller is more approachable. Similarly, two males or two females traveling together will find it easier to integrate into the local culture than a male and female couple will. The reason for this is simple: unlike North American culture, most societies have separate roles and functions for women and men. It is, therefore, easier for you and your hosts to find avenues for integration if you travel alone or with someone from the same sex.
  - **Couples and long-term cross-cultural travel:** Living in a completely different culture is challenging under any circumstances. Individuals suffer from mood swings while overcoming adaptation and coping issues. By the same token, couples who travel together may experience tumultuous changes in their relationship. Prepare for the fact that “managing the relationship” will be an important aspect of your time abroad. The scenario is somewhat similar for people who travel abroad in groups (for example; volunteer organizations often send groups abroad) where the group experience is often more intense than the cross-cultural experience.
  - **Interns wanting to work abroad as a couple:** Organizations sponsoring international interns can rarely accommodate a couple. Your best bet is to try to be posted in the same city, adjacent cities, or adjacent countries. Plan on visiting each other on weekends. If only one of you lands an internship abroad, still consider going, and make arrangements to accommodate your relationship while away—such as planning to meet up during a break, or traveling after the internship is complete. Alternatively, one spouse accepts the internship, and the other travels as a companion with the hope of finding work while abroad.
  - **Long-term volunteers going abroad as a couple or with a young family:** If you are going abroad for a long-term volunteer position (a year or more), organizations generally make an effort to accommodate the professional needs of both partners as well as the needs of families. Note that there will normally be a few perks for your child’s education, such as private schools or paid vacations home.
  - **Professionals, where both spouses want to work abroad:** When two people with professional qualifications want to go abroad and both have the intention of working, who should be looking for a job first? The easy answer to this question is that the spouse with the most specialized and most highly-paid profession should be the first to find a job. The accompanying spouse (he or she may humorously refer to him/herself as the trailing spouse—the one without a job) should be the person with the most portable career, such as nursing, teaching, or general management. Thus in the case of a couple with one spouse being an engineer and the other a teacher, it is the engineer who should first find the international job, since the teacher can easily find work when arriving in the host country.
- **Families and international resumes:** International employers recognize that the trailing spouse is an important component in a successful assignment abroad, and that most trailing spouses have aspirations to find work while abroad. International job seekers should therefore always mention the “spouse’s occupation” at the end of their resume, especially if the spouse has a portable career. Since international employers also take on family responsibilities, international resumes often mention marital status (single or married), number of children (include note on level of dependency), and level of mobility (example, single and available for travel).
  - **Gay couple to work abroad:** Volunteer organizations will often accommodate a gay couple if the couple is attuned to the necessities and nuances required for gay life while living in close quarters with host country nationals. Mid-career professional couples have an easier time, since accommodating employers usually employ them. Expatriates abroad are also generally familiar with and welcoming to gay professional couples. The accompanying spouse usually ends up being underemployed, however, and local norms must dictate how open couples are when the accompanying spouse looks for local employment.
  - **Single person with child to work abroad:** If you are a young person with a child looking for an entry-level position abroad, it is very difficult to find an employer willing to accommodate you. There are always a few exceptions and we have also heard of the odd parent successfully backpacking with a young child in developing countries. The situation is much different for mid-career or internationally experienced professionals who are single parents. They find that living abroad is actually easier than in their home country, since they often have recourse to inexpensive household staff. They can therefore concentrate more easily on their professional lives and still have plenty of quality time with their children. The ease of having a rich family life while abroad also means that many female mid-career singles choose to adopt or have a child while remaining single.
  - **Work abroad with children:** When planning to live in developing countries, some families with children under the age of three decide to wait until the youngest child is slightly older before moving. Families with children in high school often decide to spend these years in North America, providing a consistent environment for their teens. Parents of university-aged children are free to roam the world, provided they do not have to deal with aging parents.
  - **Mid-career couples go abroad with family:** Once established in your international career, it is a great life, with plenty of quality family time, good schools and great opportunities for family travel.
  - **Fifty-plus couples abroad:** Some couples go abroad as a pre-retirement career option. Couples who have been married for a long-time are often comfortable spending a few months apart while one spouse goes abroad. If you have the means, the options are endless for those nearing retirement and also for those working part-time. You can always go abroad to teach English or act as a volunteer consultant.

There is no doubt that international work and travel has an effect on relationships. With a little foresight, a bit of creativity, and a good amount of tolerance for the unconventional, you can succeed in having an international career while being successful as a couple. Bon voyage and good luck with your career and relationships.

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