

You are now home after going abroad. Since you have built up international credentials you may have aspirations to find full-time work abroad. Alternatively, you may have decided to look for domestic employment and want to know how to market your international expertise to employers who have no international experience. In either case, this article is here to help you get the best from your international travel experience and market it to employers.

Take an Inventory of Your Experience

When you return from your international travel experience, you are already well on your way to developing a solid international IQ. This is the unique package of skills possessed by people who have lived abroad—and these are the skills sought out by international employers. Before writing a resume, you need to review the international skills you have gained from your time abroad. The following will help you assess the new skills you acquired:

Low-skilled work experience abroad is marketable: Future employers, especially if they are international employers, will judge you based on your personality traits more than your work experience. Recruiters recognize that people who succeed abroad have a specific set of skills and traits. To prove this, you must be capable of recognizing and selling your skills. Read on for more tips. (See also *MyWorldAbroad, Selling Your International Skills.*)

Professional experience abroad: Hopefully, you supercharged the international value of your time abroad by doing a few extra things that will look good on your resume. Employers want to know that you successfully accomplished tasks in a new environment. Did you:

- Lead a group of fellow travellers on a fact-finding visit with local professionals?
- Complete projects within a multicultural environment?
- Organize a social event or outing?
- Work part-time, with a professor, or as a language coach?
- Volunteer abroad?
- Overcome a bureaucratic hurdle by making use of professional skills?

Audit your time abroad for professional experiences and be prepared to describe them in your resume and when meeting employers.

Country-specific skills: Can you speak about the specific cultural traits of your host country nationals? If not, read up on this now by consulting books on country-specific cultural traits and published by companies such as Nicholas Brealey Publishing (<http://nicholasbrealey.com>). Imagine the impact on potential employers when you are able to contrast the work habits of your Japanese host with people in your home country. You also gain points with employers if you traveled independently, or lived with host nationals. In all these cases, prepare descriptions that support your professional and intercultural skills.

Universal cross-cultural skills: While abroad, you developed a unique set of cross-cultural skills. These are portable! You can apply these in any new country. You are familiar with culture shock and can professionally describe it. You understand the cycle of stress and exhilaration of moving to a new place. You are more adaptable, open-minded and observant. You can spot cultural differences and change your behaviour to accommodate local norms. You have a better understanding of yourself and you can use this self-knowledge when making decisions in a culture other than your own. You are curious, brave and have a sense of adventure. At the same time you are streetwise and can function in unfamiliar environments. All these skills can be woven into your resume and when networking with recruiters.

Language skills: You already know that language skills are important for international and domestic employers. Even basic or obscure language skills indicate a propensity for language learning in general. When communicating with employers, indicate the level of reading, writing and speaking a second language you acquired. Always describe what you can do as opposed to what you can't.

General work skills: When speaking to employers, recognize the value of the general skills you developed while abroad. You are adept at managing

change and you are independent and self-disciplined while being sensitive to the needs of others. There are dozens of work characteristics developed abroad: resourcefulness, versatility, persistence, an observant and calm demeanour, diligence, communication skills, broad and strategic thinking, an ability to deal with ambiguities, courage, open-mindedness, flexibility, resourcefulness, tact, listening and observing skills, an ability to deal with stress, sense of humour, awareness of interpersonal politics, a respect for protocol and hierarchy, loyalty and tenacity. All of these skills are valuable to you when contacting domestic as well as international employers.

How to Explain Your International Experience

You are already aware that, with the exception of others who have lived abroad, very few people are interested in or able to understand your life changing travel experiences. Here are a few tips to help you sell your skills to future employers.

Be professional in describing your travel experiences: You are probably fairly animated about the challenges you faced while abroad. Practise rewording your description of job responsibilities in a more businesslike manner. Be formal and articulate.

Use the language of your future work: You may have to give up the expatriate jargon that has become second nature to you. Avoid using names and titles that will be foreign to your prospective employer. Speak in terms familiar to your audience. For example, use "adjustment" instead of "culture shock"; use "able to deal with change" instead of "cross-cultural adaptability"; use "interpersonal skills" instead of "cultural sensitivity"; use "effective listening skills" instead of "cross-cultural communications"; use "political acuity" instead of "diplomacy."

Speak of your successes and accomplishments: Do not discuss insurmountable challenges or why you did not succeed at something. Employers, especially those with no international experience, will not be able to understand the context and could form erroneous conclusions about your capabilities.

Network with other world travelers: Actively seek out others who have recently returned from abroad who can provide mutual support during your job search.

How to Boast About Your Skills

It can feel awkward to boast about your own skills. Non-North Americans in particular have a cultural aversion to selling themselves to employers. Here are a few tips to make the act more palatable when networking with employers.

- **Say what others say about you:** "My previous supervisor relied on me mainly to..." "My colleagues appreciate working with me because..."
- **Say why you were successful:** "I can attribute my successes to being able to..." "In my previous position, I was commended for..." "This project was successfully managed because I..."
- **Say how you do things:** "When managing a project, I always pay close attention to..." "I am particularly well known for my skills in..." "My general approach in these circumstances is to always..."

Write an Elevator Pitch

There are multiple situations where you will need to respond to someone saying: "Tell me about yourself." Imagine that you will have one short elevator ride to explain to a potential employer who you are. A two-paragraph professional description of yourself written before you write your resume will help you figure out the high level attributes of the professional you. These are your "main" selling points; focus on highlights only. Decide on a theme to bring it all together. The first paragraph should be hard skills (work, study, volunteer experience). Build a theme around international experience if looking for international work. The second should be about your soft skills (what makes you succeed in a work environment). This second paragraph is the most challenging. Ensure that each paragraph supports your major theme.

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Career Tips After Your Time Abroad

Develop a Stock of Career Stories

Everyone who has worked and lived abroad has their own list of “wild and shocking” stories to share with friends. These edgy cross-cultural experiences are fun to share, but are not appropriate for potential employers. You need to modify them or devise a new set of cross-cultural career-related stories about your travel experiences. Craft these stories ahead of time and build them to reinforce your professional skill sets. Here are a few examples:

- Describe your roles working with local colleagues and in teams while abroad.
- Describe your encounters when meeting professionals.
- Speak about personal encounters that gave you insight into the local culture.
- Speak about the link between your country and the host country, especially in terms of the work place. Describe your professional skills through a story about a cross-cultural encounter that went wrong.

You only need three or four of these pre-scripted career stories when job searching. One story alone is often enough to demonstrate a whole grouping of your professional skills/maturity, insightfulness, sound judgment, cross-cultural knowledge, etc.

Writing About Your Travel Credentials in a Resume

Younger professionals should write about their travel experience more extensively than mid-career professionals. Consider writing a section about your travel experiences as if it were a job. Start with the job title “Cross-cultural and Professional Experience While Traveling Abroad.” Include countries and dates. Outline your experience abroad and the skills you developed. Consider describing your travel experience with bullets for your leadership roles when organizing fellow travellers, cross-cultural mentoring roles, integrating with local families and professionals, succeeding in overcoming challenges, and travel to remote or difficult areas. If you visited the offices of a world-renowned organization or with a prominent professional, reference this. Perhaps indicate how you overcame financial challenges to pay for your trip. List what fascinated you in your travels.

All of the above functions to tell employers something about your professional personality. It points to your top skills, what you are good at, and what you enjoy.

If you are applying for international work, consider grouping all your international experience (work, volunteer, study abroad, international courses, travel and languages) under one heading for greater impact.

Dealing With International Employers

Never announce to potential international employers that your career goal is to live in Paris or to travel extensively in Asia. Don't mix personal goals with career goals. Employers want to hear about goals that match their skill requirements. Tell employers that you want:

- to apply the unique set of international skills you developed while traveling and working for a year in South East Asia.
- to work in an environment that requires you to make use of the insights and knowledge acquired while accomplishing work within a multicultural team environment.
- to apply the experience and skills you developed while interning for six months in London.

The focus should be on skills, not on your personal goals.

Dealing With Employers

Who Have No International Experience

Employers with little or no international experience may have misconceptions about job seekers who have international work and travel experience. While not all employers believe the following myths about returnees, you may want to keep them in mind:

POSSIBLE EMPLOYER ASSUMPTIONS:

Returnees have emotional re-adjustment problems: They no longer feel they fit into Western society

Returnees are too exotic: They have adopted alternative lifestyles and can't be team players. They are excessively individualistic and independent. Their differences are threatening.

Returnees are flighty: They don't really want permanent jobs or long-term responsibilities. They will soon be off traveling again.

Returnees have health problems: They may have strange tropical diseases.

YOUR SOLUTIONS:

Do not overstate or dwell on your re-entry adjustment problems: Stress positive aspects of your overseas and re-entry experience.

Do not say that you plan to return overseas: You are glad to be home in familiar surroundings.

State that you are happy to be back: This is your home. You are anxious to join your peers in the working world.

Demonstrate your business acumen: Draw attention to your effective work habits, adaptability to new technologies, willingness to be a team player, understanding of Western leadership styles.

Avoid wearing souvenir clothing or jewellery: Dress in smart, businesslike clothing. Focus on fitting in.

Show your attachment to home: Mention your enthusiasm for things like home cooking, a particular university, or a sports team. Talk about the pleasures of finally reading home country newspapers again.

Say that you are healthy: Mention the clean bill of health you received during your recent physical.

A Last Word

After an extended period of living and working abroad, you know the value that this type of experiential education brings you. You have now returned home a stronger individual. You have insights into the world that others who have not traveled do not have. You are conscious of a wider set of ideas about humanity. Your planet is smaller, your insights are larger. Whether you are speaking to domestic or international employers, your experience abroad will always provide you with strengths and vision that are almost unattainable under circumstances other than living abroad. Your intellect is stimulated and your mind is free when you live in close proximity to people from a different culture. Good luck and best wishes in your long career of continued learning.

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