

# Career Tips During Your Travels Abroad

You can build professional job experience while traveling abroad. Here are a few tips to help you along once you are settled in a new country:

## Contacting Employers Directly

**Be forward when networking and contacting employers:** The charm of a bright, enthused, articulate, and prepared international job seeker will go a long way to impress international employers. The job search is a series of rejections followed by a “yes.” Stay committed.

**Decide on a career goal and target one industry:** Once you have decided on your host country, decide what type of professional job you want and focus on one industry and one city. Examples: you want to be a public relations intern in Auckland, New Zealand; you want to work as an engineer with a construction firm or at a mining site in Australia; you want to work as film technician with a TV production firm in London, England. (See *MyWorldAbroad, The Job Search and Targeting Your Research.*)

**What type of professional jobs should I target?** The choice is easy for an engineer or graphic artist. For others, however (for example a sociology or linguistics major), choosing a target for your professional job search might seem difficult. The answer in choosing the correct job search target is to understand your key skill sets. What are the dominant features of your professional personality? Figure out your best skills and target these types of jobs. An outgoing person should work in sales, customer service or public relations. A shy but process-oriented person should work in systems jobs; if you are a good writer, consider technical writing. The job search will be easier if you target, but remain open to alternatives if they arise.

**Should I target large or small organizations?** If you have stellar qualifications target large organizations but remember that their hiring process is generally longer. Everyone should consider targeting small and medium-sized organizations, where the hiring process may be less formal and you can literally walk in off the street and impress employers.

**Use key words when contacting employers:** Your objective is to make the hiring decision easy. Say that you have a valid work permit, that you are looking for professional work in exchange for experience, willing to work for low wages or as an intern and looking for project work or short term contracts.

## Job Search Strategies

**Employ traditional job search techniques:** Use all the traditional methods. Online job boards are a great way to track down who is hiring. Contact these employers directly to ask about parallel jobs (ignore no-call notices).

**Research job fairs or professional fairs in your industry:** Google your destination city for job fairs. Imagine the value of visiting 100 or more employers in one day. Dress smartly and pass out your business cards and resumes. Follow up with phone calls and request interviews.

**Contact friends and family:** If your uncle knows an engineer living abroad or your cousin runs a consulting business overseas, make contact with them before going abroad and tell them that you are looking for a short-term professional work assignment. Search out distant relatives; ask your friends and professional acquaintances if they have contacts. And don't forget, if someone does help you in your host country, thank them profusely. Everyone who has worked with young professionals has strong memories of the single few who were thankful.

**Network with experts in your field:** E-mail professors or authors working in your field and ask them if they need a research assistant. Research current projects in your industry and offer your services. These scenarios are not outlandish; they work!

**Teach English Abroad:** This is a great strategy if you are going to a non-English speaking country. Try not to limit your professional experience by teaching children (unless that fits your career goal). Consider teaching business English and start meeting professionals who may be able to offer you a job. Also look for editing and writing positions in non-English speaking countries.

## Networking and Career Building Strategies

Employment is not the only way to build a resume. Your future resume will shine brighter if you provide a few examples of these initiatives.

**Show initiative in a cross-cultural environment:** You can prove your worth to future employers by taking the initiative to accomplish a few identifiable career-building experiences while abroad. Organize an event, lead a group of fellow travellers, volunteer in your field, or arrange a visit with professionals in your areas of expertise. These activities show future employers that you have what it takes to succeed in a new culture.

**Meet professionals in your field of expertise while abroad:** Find fellow travellers who share your professional interests and organize a professional fact-finding visit to a local firm, international organization, government department or industry association. Attend trade association meetings. You may make job contacts during these endeavours and you will certainly learn more about your field and have career stories to share with recruiters.

**Volunteer in your field:** Target opportunities in your area of interest and learn about the local community.

**Take a course at the local university:** Increase the career value of your time abroad by taking one course targeting your profession at the local university or through a professional association. Join local student groups and participate in their events. Use the contacts you make there to find work with a prominent professor and gain access to other career-building opportunities.

**Travel to neighbouring countries:** Don't limit your time abroad to one host country. Consider implementing the strategies mentioned in this section in neighbouring countries.

## Gain Cross-cultural Experience

Make friends and have fun, but professionalize your travel experience to show future employers that you functioned professionally abroad.

**Make an effort to meet the locals:** If you only hang out with fellow travellers, especially those from your home country, you will miss out on a lot of cross-cultural learning.

**Be sociable and seek out professional contacts:** When you are in an overseas environment, be bolder than usual. Go out to meet people, especially those in your field. Time is short, opportunities randomly present themselves and you must seize the moments to make contact with locals. Learn to ask to meet people for lunch or coffee; ask them to join you on a picnic or a bike ride. Try to get yourself invited into their homes, offices or cottages. Build relationships. You are a visiting stranger and it is common that travellers throughout the world are hosted by locals. You are interesting company for many.

**Learn to professionally describe your host country's culture:** It's easy to be professional when describing another culture. Read a few books on your host country such as: *Mind Your Manners: Managing Business Cultures in Europe* or *Culture Shock! Australia: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette* or *Brit-Think, Ameri-Think: A Transatlantic Survival Guide*. Create a short professional description of the cultural norms for your host country and impress future employers.

## A Last Word

If you go abroad with a professional mindset, you are likely to find professional work. The strategies proposed on this page require effort. You must be determined in achieving your objective. Whatever job you get you can always find ways to take on new initiatives and impress employers, and thus build professional experiences to write about on future resumes. Have fun and good luck!



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