

STARTING A NEW LIFE ABROAD

FROM THE HONEYMOON PHASE TO COMMITMENT

THE ULTIMATE GUIDE
TO BUILDING A
LIFE ABROAD



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The Ultimate Guide to Building a Life Abroad

By Alphonsine Pelletier

This book is for those preparing to move abroad and for those already living overseas, quietly struggling to make sense of it all. It is for anyone questioning whether to begin again somewhere new or stay where they are. It is also for those who have returned home, only to find that home no longer feels the way it once did. Wherever you find yourself on this journey, this book is meant to help you understand the emotional landscape of starting a new life in a new country, and to remind you that what you're feeling is not unusual and that you are not alone.

STAGE 1: ATTRACTION & FIRST MEETING

CHAPTER I: THE IDEA OF A NEW LIFE

Imagine you are single and decide to re-enter the dating scene, ultimately meeting someone. Maybe it's someone you have known for a while. Or you went on a dating site and were matched with someone who is a good fit for you. Maybe you were introduced through a mutual friend, or you randomly came across them while on a coffee run. Now, imagine the same scenario with moving to a new country.

The parallel isn't just poetic, it's literal. Both experiences follow similar emotional arcs, trigger the same neurochemical responses, and present the same psychological challenges. Understanding this parallel isn't just intellectually interesting; it's practically useful. If you've already experienced being in a relationship, you can prepare yourself for the journey ahead.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND RELATIONS

That rush we feel when we think of moving abroad isn't just emotional; it's chemical. It's the same as when we enter a new relationship. When we picture our future life, our brain releases oxytocin, the chemical responsible for the feeling of connection we experience when we fall in love, hold someone's hand, or share a deep conversation.

But oxytocin is just the beginning. Your brain is also flooding with dopamine, the reward chemical that makes everything feel exciting and full of possibility. This is why you can't stop researching your target country, refreshing real estate listings, or imagining your new daily routine. It's the same reason you can't stop thinking about a new romantic interest, replaying conversations, checking your phone for messages, imagining future scenarios together.

This neurochemical cocktail serves an important evolutionary purpose: it motivates you to take risks, leave your comfort zone, and pursue opportunities that might improve your life. Without this chemical push, humans would never have migrated across continents, explored unknown territories, or built new communities in unfamiliar places. The dopamine rush is nature's way of making massive life changes feel not just bearable but thrilling.

The danger, of course, is that this chemical state is temporary. The high doesn't last. Eventually, your brain recalibrates to baseline, and what felt electric becomes familiar. This doesn't mean you made a mistake; it means you're transitioning from infatuation to something more sustainable, but also more complex and demanding.

THE POWER OF POSSIBILITY

The honeymoon phase is a crucial stage when adapting to a new environment or relationship. When you start over, whether with a new partner or in a new country, the possibilities seem endless.

During this phase, everything is new and therefore interesting. A simple grocery shopping trip becomes an adventure when you're trying to read product labels in an unfamiliar language. A walk through your new neighborhood reveals architectural details you observe with fascination. The way locals greet each other, the buzz of traffic, the different smell, whether of trees or cooking, all of it feels extraordinary because all of it is so different from what you are familiar with.

If it's a new partner, you will find their quirks endearing rather than annoying. The way they organize their kitchen, their taste in music, and their passionate opinions about topics you never considered. All these feel like new discoveries. They are glimpses into this fascinating person you're getting to know. You're not yet annoyed by their habits because you're still in the discovery phase, where differences are interesting rather than frustrating.

This phase serves a crucial purpose beyond just making you feel good. You're unknowingly building a reservoir of positive associations and memories you'll draw on later when things get difficult. When you're sobbing in frustration because you can't communicate due to different love languages, or you feel profoundly incompetent in front of a bureaucrat who can't understand what you're saying, you'll remember those early positive experiences, which will become your anchor when things don't go your way.

WHEN DREAMS INSPIRE YOU TO TAKE ACTION

The transformative power of the honeymoon phase lies in its ability to generate momentum. When you can vividly imagine your future, seeing yourself speaking the language fluently, forming new friendships, feeling at home in a new neighborhood, or building a life with this new person, meeting their family, creating new traditions, that vision pulls you forward through obstacles that would otherwise stop you.

Without the ability to dream big, most people would never make significant life changes. Because it's when you start dreaming big that you also start thinking long-term and, consequently, take action. After all, moving abroad is objectively difficult. It's expensive (unless your employer pays for the move), bureaucratically complex (unless you pay someone to do the work for you), emotionally challenging, and socially isolating.

But if you only focus on those realities, you'd never leave. Dreaming big and seeing the big picture will not just make the move pleasant; it will make it possible, and make the practical obstacles seem conquerable. This is where the honeymoon phase transitions from pure feeling to practical planning, from fantasy to framework, from vacation mode to life-building mode.

Note: Dreams require action to become reality, and action requires commitment.

VISAS AND COMMITMENT

If moving abroad were a relationship, visas would be the moment you stop dating casually (visiting the country) and start thinking about a serious relationship (living in the country). Visas are not just legal documents; they are the framework that turns your intention into action and your dreams into reality.

Choosing the right visa, such as retirement, work, digital nomad, student, entrepreneur, family reunification, and so on, is like creating a profile for your ideal date, because in both cases, you are deciding how you want to build your new life.

Each visa category represents a different relationship with the country and a different version of your life there. A work visa ties you to employment, offering stability but limiting flexibility. A digital nomad visa offers freedom but might exclude you from resident benefits. A retirement visa requires financial proof but offers stability. A student visa allows you to be in the country but restricts your ability to work. Each choice shapes not just your legal status but your daily reality, your opportunities, and your constraints.

Applying for a long-term visa is your “defining the relationship” conversation moment with the country. You’re not just choosing paperwork; you’re choosing an identity and a lifestyle. You’re no longer just visiting on tourist visas, keeping things casual, maintaining the option to walk away at any moment. You’re now asking if you can make this official. And just as in relationships, this choice requires honest self-assessment: Who are you really? What do you actually need? What are you willing to sacrifice? What kind of life do you want to build?

THE ADMINISTRATIVE AWAKENING

However, unlike love, visas are far from romantic. They are administrative, often confusing, and sometimes frustrating, as one document leads to another, and another, until discouragement sets in.

This is where your fantasy bumps into bureaucracy, where the dream meets the paperwork, where oxytocin gives way to cortisol. You need documents to prove things you can’t yet prove. You need approvals that depend on other approvals. You need patience when all you want is jump into that airplane and start your new life. You need money for fees you didn’t budget for. You need time when time zones and processing delays make everything take weeks longer than it should.

The visa process isn’t designed to be romantic. It’s designed to be a filter, separating people who are genuinely committed from those who are just infatuated with an idea. It tests your resolve, your patience, your resourcefulness, and your willingness to do unglamorous work for what you want. Many people discover during this process that their commitment level isn’t actually high enough to endure the frustration. The fantasy might have been appealing, but the reality turns out to be too much to handle.

Where some abandon, each obstacle that the others overcome becomes evidence of their commitment. Each document gathered proof that they’re serious. Each frustrating phone call or office visit becomes part of the story they’ll tell later. Instead of getting discouraged, they invest themselves even more.

THE MOMENT OF CLARITY

And much like a relationship, this is the stage when you realize that affection alone isn't enough and that you need to define your intentions and review your long-term goals if you want to get what your heart desires.

The visa process prompts you to confront existential questions you may have avoided while dreaming:

- Do I really want this enough to endure bureaucratic frustration?
- Where do I see myself in five, ten years from now?
- What am I willing to sacrifice for this life?
- What happens if things don't work out as I imagined?
- Am I running toward something specific, or just away from something uncomfortable?
- Can I handle the reality of this, not just the fantasy?

These aren't only essential questions. The honeymoon phase lets you live in the moment, but long-term relocation requires thinking years ahead. You must get practical about visa renewal pathways, permanent residency options, financial sustainability, healthcare access, and what "home" will mean going forward.

This is the same work required in serious relationships. You have to move past "do we enjoy each other's company?" to "are we actually compatible for building a life together?" Because there comes a time when the love or affection that brought you this far won't be enough. You also need compatibility, shared goals, realistic expectations, and the willingness to do the boring, difficult work of building something sustainable.

MEETING THE PARENTS: THE VISA INTERVIEW

The visa interview or consulate appointment is the moment of truth. Consider it as your "meeting the parents" moment, where you sit across from an immigration officer who holds your future in their hands.

You've prepared your documents like you'd rehearse conversation topics before a dinner with prospective in-laws. You've organized bank statements, employment letters, proof of ties to your home country, or evidence of your relationship if you're applying for a spouse or fiancé visa. Just like in a relationship, maybe your lawyer, acting as your best friend, has helped you practice your answers, anticipate their questions, and dress to impress.

But just like meeting someone's parents, no matter how much you prepare, you can't help being nervous. What if they don't believe your intentions to relocate are genuine? Will they scrutinize that gap in your employment history or question why you withdrew that large sum from your savings account? What if I'm missing a document, or they request additional evidence, or, worse, they reject my application?

The interview reminds you that this process isn't just about you wanting something; it's about proving you deserve it. **You must convince a stranger that your commitment is real**, that you'll follow the rules, and that you won't overstay your welcome. This is a very vulnerable, exposing, and sometimes arbitrary moment, much like sitting through a whole dinner, knowing full well that your future in-laws are probably debating whether you're "good enough" for their child.

THE PRE-NUP: UNDERSTANDING VISA CONDITIONS

Once the visa is approved, or you finally get the parents' approval, everything changes. You become emotionally invested because nothing is accidental anymore; you made it happen. And yet, like the clauses in a pre-nuptial agreement, or the fine print in any written contract, there will be non-negotiable conditions attached to the visa.

Which is why **you should know which visa you are applying for, since not all visas are created equal, and some come with strict restrictions**, or know the terms of the pre-nup. Imagine you get a work visa and find out you can only work for your sponsoring employer, which means you won't be able to pursue other opportunities, unless you find an employer ready to sponsor you for a new visa. If you are on a student visa, you may be required to maintain full-time enrollment and a minimum GPA to renew the visa. You can retire or live in the country, but only if you don't need access to public funds or meet the minimum income requirements.

If you break these conditions, the relationship ends. You can't work without authorization, or your visa will be revoked. If you earn less than the required amount, your renewal will be denied. You drop out of your program, and you might get deported. It's a sobering reality, as it is a reminder that **getting a visa isn't a declaration of unconditional love but a contractual arrangement between the two parties**. As restrictive as the obligations may feel, you must respect them because not doing so will have consequences that can't be undone with a simple apology.

Of course, you will always find people trying to bend the rules, just like in relationships. They will get paid in cash while working on a tourist visa, overstay by "just a few days," or marry for papers rather than love. But **immigration authorities, like scorned partners, have long memories**. The violations won't only follow you and appear on future applications; they might also lead to a ban and denied entry to a country you once dreamed of calling home.

NAVIGATING VISA LIMBO

Not everyone's visa journey follows a linear path. Some people find themselves in that dreaded "it's complicated" status. It's a hard place to be, since they are caught between approvals and rejections, between one visa expiring and another pending, living between countries while waiting for decisions that take months or even years.

Imagine being on a temporary visa while applying for permanent residency, not sure if you should buy property, sign a long-term lease, or wait for your situation to clear up. You might be waiting for a work permit while watching job opportunities slip away because employers won't wait three months for government approval. And the worst is getting separated from your partner or children while the family visa process is ongoing.

The limbo stage is emotionally exhausting and physically draining. **You're doing your best to move things forward, but you don't hold the cards.** You've planned your life around this move, ready to uproot your family, but are now at the mercy of bureaucratic timelines and immigration policies. It's like being in a relationship where your partner suddenly says, "I need some time to rethink our relationship" or "We need a break," leaving you waiting, unable to make any major life decisions because everything depends on their answer.

Some people navigate multiple visa types throughout their journey. They start on a student visa, switch to a graduate work visa, then apply for skilled worker sponsorship, and eventually obtain permanent residency. However, each transition implies new applications, new fees, new documentation, and, subsequently, new anxiety, as they must constantly prove themselves and justify why they deserve to stay.

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

- Eleanor Roosevelt