

Strangers in a strange land

CULTURE SHOCK is a reality for those who have lived abroad; but for the women expatriates who participated in the recent Ladies Who Lunch: BusinessWorld Female Forum, there are ways to get around it.

With the theme "Stranger in a Strange Land," the 11th installment of the exclusive ladies' forum hosted by BusinessWorld and HerWord.com focused on the issues faced by women expatriates living in the Philippines. BusinessWorld invited women expats who reside in Metro Manila—most of whom are spouses of foreign diplomats and owners of businesses based in the Philippines—to share their take on what it's like to live in a foreign country.

The event's guest speaker, Camilla Brooks, discussed the implications of deciding to live a life outside one's homeland. Having moved to the Philippines seven years ago, Brooks recounted the days when she would miss living in New York while leading the simple life in Bohol province where she stayed for two years.

"A lot of times, it was the people around me that made me decide to stay. Of course, there was my job, and a sense of commitment," she said. "But I really enjoyed it. And even now, I tell people that I live in the Philippines and am more comfortable living here than anywhere else."

Brooks is now the general manager of Crown Relocations Philippines, a worldwide relocation company that specializes in assisting expats during their global career. Crown not only moves household effects, but also caters to the softer side of the move offering home search, school search, cultural training, and orientation to expatriates. Brooks is also the past president of the American Women's Club of the Philippines.

"Living in a different place is challenging," she said, as she addressed her audience, which consisted mainly of expats who hail from the US, Europe, and Asia. "But I think it's important for people to get outside of their comfort zones. It can be difficult, but it's extremely rewarding."

Brooks also noted that women tend to deal with the challenges of culture shock differently. In contrast to men's innate fight-or-flight reaction to stressful situations, she said that women are wired to "tend and befriend," a new theory proposed by Shelley Taylor, a psychologist at the University of California, LA. This means that instead of avoiding the



Participants at the eleventh edition of Ladies Who Lunch pose for a group picture at Lemuria.

system or going against it, they find strength in tending to their family and by joining social groups for support.

"We need to bring people in and build a support network to be able to adapt to a new environment. Historically, because we were tending to offspring, we couldn't fight and we couldn't flee, we developed a different way of approaching stress, we needed strength in numbers. In expat living, we adapt the same, we need people around us," she said.

Joining a network of expatriates has proven helpful for some of the guests who have just been in the country for about a year or so. The first days were always difficult, they said, especially when it came to following certain traffic rules (that are not often followed) and adjusting to what is known as "Filipino time." Yet most of them could only describe their Philippine experience as something that's "fascinating" and memorable.

Yasko Katsura, wife of the Japanese ambassador, said that, despite dealing with a completely different culture, she never found the Philippines a difficult place to live in. She has been living in the country with her husband for two and a half years and, so far, she hasn't felt the urge to go home.

"I never experienced any culture shock at all because Filipin-

nos are very nice; they're warm-hearted. Unlike in other countries, where people find it hard to settle down, here, it's so easy because the people are friendly. They won't make you feel left out. And besides, you can practically find everything you need here," she said.

To cap the event, an award was given to the guest who traveled the most to different parts of the Philippines. Oya Basaga, spouse of the Turkish ambassador, won the "Almost Filipina" award and received a special gift from BusinessWorld.

The Ladies Who Lunch "Stranger in a Strange Land" forum was held last September 4, 2009 at Lemuria, which is located at 5 Julieta Circle, Horseshoe Village, Quezon City. The forum was facilitated by radio broadcaster, Ma. Luisa Charina Ramento. BusinessWorld and HerWord.com hosted the event. Sponsors included Marie France, L'Oreal, FitFlop, VMV Hypoallergenics, and Envirosax, with special partners Lemuria and Snapworx, and the participation of Ilana.

To find out more about the Ladies Who Lunch: BusinessWorld Female Forum series, visit our website at www.herword.com.

Sponsored by:

marie france



L'ORÉAL
PARIS



VSR/C
VMVSKIN RESEARCH CENTRE + CLINICS

Special Partners:

