My experience in Brazil - The story of an expatriate

Every expatriate has different requirements. Every expatriate should be treated individually specific to their needs. To demonstrate one expatriate’s experience firsthand, they have shared their journey to help you understand the relocation process.

Why Brazil?

In 2008, the global economic crisis began, heavily affecting Europe and the United States. Our company had planned to expand with new projects in new countries. Because of the financial downturn, we researched markets with potential for high-growth, despite the crisis. Top of the list was Brazil, with an annual average economic growth of 10 percent since 1991. Thus making it the largest economy in Latin America and the eighth largest in the world. With over 200 million people, it became increasingly attractive to small and medium companies that saw their traditional markets in jeopardy due to the crisis. To succeed, we considered the possibility of opening an office in this country. We attended several meetings with our advisors to help us come to our final decision. In the coming years, Brazil faces an ambitious investment program particularly due to two major event: Brazil World Cup 2014 and Olympics 2016.

Everything seems easier, in theory...

I was going to be president of our new office in Sao Paulo, Brazil. It seemed a great opportunity to grow with the company in this vibrant city. From this point, we focused on the relocation details. Although we wanted to open the office as soon as possible, we didn’t have the knowledge or resource.

We began with three basic questions: Where? How? And When? In theory, these questions are easily answered, yet took us a long time to resolve. I traveled to Sao Paulo several times to develop our plan and most importantly, get an idea of the lifestyle in this city. The time was ticking but I still did not have an office location or enough information to start this professional and personal project. In addition to these concerns, I had not begun my home search for my family, school search and had not arranged any documentation. All these little details were creating a much bigger problem. It was obvious that I needed a Consultant to help with my issues as so far, I had made no progress. Every step of the relocation process requires a knowledge of the local culture. Whoever attempts to face the process alone and without mastering the language of this country is doomed to fail. This all means loss of time and money.

The challenges we faced

The processes
To organize legal business processes there were long-steps to take that involved in-depth red tape, often dealing with non-English speaking institutions.

The office location
Finding a suitable location for the office was a problem. A temporary office for the interim period was required while waiting for the permanent office. But where to begin?
The Education
Despite attending public schools, 7.5 percent of children between seven and 14 years in Brazil are illiterate. In the world education rankings, Brazil is ranked 94 out of 169 countries and so far, there is no improvement to the education system. I knew that education was not good in Sao Paulo but not to that extend. This created another concern, I needed to enroll my children into school as soon as possible, one that offered quality education. But what school was right? Where could I find them? Few met with my requirements.

The House
Pleasing more than one person can be a difficult task. Finding the perfect home was a daunting prospect because it needed to appeal to the whole family. I wanted everyone to feel comfortable in their new home. Moving to Sao Paulo meant a radical change for all of us, not only because of language, but also the new culture. My children’s friends were in Madrid and were neither prepared nor willing to leave them. For them, it was a drastic change and they could not understand the need to move from our home. My wife was more sympathetic but did not like the idea of leaving for good. Personally, leaving Spain behind was also very difficult, it was my home. For all of us Brazil meant enduring a 10-hour flight, leaving friends and family, face the challenge of meeting new people and get use to new habits all in an unfamiliar city. A new home is crucial to get a positive start to a relocation. So, I needed to find the perfect home. I knew the house rental market had lots of potential as there was a wide variety of homes in each neighborhood. But first, you have to be clear about where you want to live. That left two questions: What location? And what budget?

The Visa
The first time I visited Brazil wasn’t to engage in any work activity, but as a tourist. In fact, this trip was to get an idea about life in Brazil, to find out about all the processes and of course to make contacts. The second trip was to begin the necessary business processes. We researched the legal possibilities to work in Brazil and discovered that a business visa was required to start our project. At this stage, the easiest solution we could see was a temporary visa which can allow a maximum of 200 days per year. Obviously that was not a long-term solution which is what we needed to open our office. I needed a permanent visa but didn’t know what kind, what were the requirements or how long the process would take.

The move
Moving all our belongings to another city, no problem … or so I thought! Can we move all the furniture? Will our appliances work there? Will our belonging arrive safely?

The next step - Welcome Crown
It was clear we needed help in virtually all aspects of this relocation and business set-up, and quickly. After some research, we found Crown, a company who provide services to expatriates with a presence in several countries, including Spain and Brazil. We made contact to understand how they worked, discuss the services they offer and processes needed to go through. We decided it was the right company for us! The Crown Spain and Brazil team worked together to organize home, office and school searches, made visa and relocation arrangements. Together we worked on a "time-plan" to see when we could carry out each step. During one of my trips to Brazil, a member of the Crown team took me on an orientation tour and was there to support us on any issue we had throughout the whole process. He showed me the most suitable location for a new office and the neighborhoods where expatriates are usually based. He also explained all the details to keep in mind when choosing our home, a school and an office. After this day tour, I knew more about Sao Paulo than from all of my previous travel so far.

One step closer - The new office
Crown helped with the legal process to open our office in Sao Paulo. I didn’t know how to begin with legalities previously. Now, all that Crown required was some documents and specific information and they prepared everything. In the meantime, they sent me a list of options for office rentals based on my requirements which I’d previously sent. After visiting each of these options, I felt certain which one was going to be our new office.
Schooling, tick!
Next on the list, school search. We chose international schools, although they are much more expensive than schools in Madrid, they are the best option in Sao Paulo for education. Some schools require several interviews and some even a knowledge test - all of which have a waiting list. To get an idea about the various international schools that met our requirements, Crown sent a curriculum of each school. We then visited our favorites, and made a decision based on the neighborhood we wanted to live in. The Crown Brazil office then dealt with the enrolling processes.

The final search - Our house
The final search was for our house. During the orientation tour, we were shown 13 recommended neighborhoods with good architecture, safer, have many restaurants, hospitals and leisure opportunities nearby, all with a variety of residential services. The budget depends on the area, the size and number of rooms. Again, based on my list of requirements, Crown sent me a list of 15 houses that we visited and then made a choice based on the best fit. Crown then organized the contract, contracted supplies and made a check-in list to help us remember everything we needed to do. Almost one month later, we had the perfect home!

The visa
The permanent visa formalities took about three months. Brazilian national documentation is important to live in the country and necessary for property purposes. To begin the process, we had to facilitate both company and personal documentation. Just doing this took one month because the legalization of some papers take a long-time. Legal translations and explanations of why we would be moving to Brazil were mandatory. Crown then submitted our application to be analyzed by the ministry of labor in Brazil. Once it was approved, all the necessary documentation was sent to the Brazilian consulate in Madrid where the visa was sealed. With this visa we were granted entry to Sao Paolo and once there, able to request the CPF/MF, RNE, CNH and CTPS.

The relocation
To determine the volume and the price, a Crown Consultant visited our home in Spain, to determine the allowance we required. To move the contents of our entire house we were given two options: boat or plane, each had advantages and disadvantages. Plane was much faster with delivery in about two weeks. However, not all our belongings were allowed to travel this way due to the limited cargo aircraft. Boat took seven weeks, however, could be transported in one shipment. We decided to ship because of the quantity of our belongings. Crown explained that a detailed inventory of all the belongings being shipped were recorded. This documentation was also necessary to export our goods and for customs clearance in Brazil.

Prior to the moving day we identified our goods through colored labels for each room to ease the unpacking once it arrived in Brazil. Since we had decided to take all our belongings, packing took place over several days. The Crown Crew packed all our stuff very carefully, from the inexpensive to the most vulnerable. When the whole house was packed, two containers were at the door ready for loading. To our satisfaction, all of our belongings arrived in perfect condition. The color coding system worked very well, saving us lots of time when it arrived to our new home.

A note from Crown …
We had the pleasure of helping this client relocate to Brazil. We are pleased to confirm that a few months after the office opening, the whole family has almost completely adapted to their new home.

In Brazil, as anywhere in the world, it is better to travel well together.

Written by Haike Gomez