

Meeting Locals can Make a Foreign Country feel like Home

The value of feeling at home

Home isn't always a place as much as a state of mind, one of comfort and belonging that can often come to us through the quality of the friends that we have there.

It's a sense of having someone to call and go out with for lunch, a drink or night out to the movies. A friend we can turn to for advice, which can be anything from a good hairdresser to issues with a local utility company.

Home is, knowing that when the brown stuff hits the fan that there is someone around who gives a damn. That's home, it goes beyond a comfortable house, job and furniture.

Why that feeling is even more important abroad



When you're moving abroad as a newbie or veteran expat, there is the initial honeymoon period that wears off. Once the newness of a place wears off you are left with the reality of everyday life.

[Surviving your first year abroad](#) can be a challenge.

Everyday life, even when abroad can become a monotonous humdrum of work and chores. The only difference will be that you will be doing your shopping, washing and working out in a different language. Surrounded by unknown faces.

Once the novelty of a place wears off, we get homesick. But it's not for a place, but for the 'sense of belonging'.

If you've just arrived at a new city and have only been there a few weeks or months, you may not yet have met other people.

We know that admitting you want to make friends sounds, naff...

In reality, most of the population are friends with the people they grew up with.

Which is why if you are not living in a big expat culture the idea of forcing yourself to go and make friends can be

difficult. Even if you are in a city with a big expat culture, just meeting other foreigners is not a local experience.

While it's great to meet others having the same experience as you, it is good to meet locals too. They'll give you an honest perspective of living in your new country.



Queensday Amsterdam a mix of Argentine, Swedish, Dutch and Polish friends

How do we go about meeting new people

Sure, for some people meeting people comes naturally. In your 20s you might just go out to a bar and clubbing and know everyone by the end of the night.

As we get a little older, we might have to force ourselves to go out and make an effort. We may need to put it on our to-do list, and heavens forbid even have an action plan of steps that we need to take.

Be prepared that it may even take longer than expected.

Let's be really honest and even brutal

It's a perk and the downside of getting older, but honesty comes with that as does wisdom. Fact: you don't have to like everyone you met.

It is ok, after having a coffee with someone you've met, to not meet up with them again.

Let's put in the extra effort and meeting people that we get on with fabulously, and soon skyrocket to the top of people that we want to spend time with.

Even if we have to force ourselves to get up and out to meet these people, on numerous occasions, for weeks or months in a row.

While meeting friends in pubs and bars, can be the easy route, however, these can be here today gone tomorrow type of friends. There are many other opportunities to meet locals in a new city.



How and where to meet locals

Here are a few ways that we can meet new people abroad with

similar interests and find common ground that is a good starting point on the road to friendship.

1. One way is finding work abroad, through an [interesting job assignment](#). Work is always a great way to meet colleagues and clients.
2. Stay somewhere unique and local
 - Homestay e.g. Bed & Breakfasts, [Airbnb](#). Or you can [host fellow travellers via Airbnb and](#) earn some travel money without at the same time.
 - Get Free Accommodation by doing a work exchange via [Workaway](#) or [Helpx](#), [Woofers](#).
 - House-sitting. Recommended sites are [Mindahome](#), and [housesittersuk](#), you may want to look up a local version.
 - [Couchsurfing](#) is more than just finding a couch to sleep on, they also have meetups and is a great place to also meet locals.
3. Attend a language exchange, if you've moved somewhere new where they speak a different language this is a great way for you to practice the language. Then to return the favour by helping someone else learn your language. Find an exchange through [conversation exchange](#) or [language exchange](#).
4. Volunteer, at a smaller local non-for-profit. The more local the organisation the better as it will not only benefit the community more, there is also less likely to be a cost involved. You will also have more opportunity to meet others in the local community.
5. Learn something new. Do a workshop in anything that tickles your fancy or that you're curious about forever. Whether it's [learning local cooking in Thailand](#), a [natural dying and weaving course in Laos](#).
6. Go to Community events, programs or talks – given by local libraries or community centres.
7. Join a local walking /bike clubs.
8. Visit local markets and spend some time talking to the

stall holders and creatives – they love a conversation and if you take the time you'll find their full of stories, insights, and tips.

9. Share a passion or mutual interest and then find a shop/studio where you can discuss and learn more. Be it Music, Gardening, Art, Books, Sport etc. etc. The list is endless.
10. Find and join a local community garden
11. Sign up and join [Meetup](#), [Internations](#), [Toastmasters](#) who all hold gatherings for people on a particular subject or in a particular city.



Friends all go and visit another friend abroad

What do we need to do next

Meeting new people can be awkward, in the beginning, it will feel akin to dating. It's rare to just ask someone you've just met for a coffee. Back home we rarely do that, or it's a polite thing to say, but not followed up on.

Yet, when we are somewhere new we need to ride out the discomfort and go out for those coffees, lunches or accept invitations to other events that we'll be invited to.

We need to keep in mind that:

Strangers are just friends that we haven't met yet

What may sound like a dull night out could potentially be that one night that we click with someone who shares our vibe. There is nothing like meeting kindred spirits, and getting to know new people – once the awkwardness has passed.



Nothing beats a real conversation

Feeling at home and becoming a local

On top of making actionable plans, also dare yourself to attempt small conversations with people everywhere. You'll find that Locals love discussing their country and advising you. Be kind and let them.

You'll learn more from the gentleman on the park bench, or the lady in the bakery than you'll pick up in a lifetime of books.

It's the people we meet, their stories that touch our lives, they welcome us and help to transform a foreign shore into a

place that we can call home.

Resources:

- www.couchsurfing.com
- www.airbnb.com
- www.workaway.info
- www.helpx.net/
- www.volunteersouthamerica.net/
- www.true Travellers.org/
- www.freevolunteering.net/
- www.withlocals.com/
- www.toastmasters.org/
- www.internations.org/
- www.meetup.com/
- www.conversationexchange.com/



Another goodbye – see you soon party...

Big gratitude for the two additional photos by:

Camels by [Kawtar CHERKAOUI](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Girls in the sunset by [Marion Michele](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Surviving your first year Abroad

You don't want to just be surviving your first year abroad, you want to fulfill your dreams and create memories that last a lifetime!

A move abroad is a serious life change, a huge upheaval. Endless planning, packing, organizing, shipping all to take your life from one location to the next. Yes it is as exhilarating, and challenging.

To make it happen, you put any nagging doubts and doomsday friends aside to get on with all you need to do, one step at a time.

Now it's over, you're in your new country, living the dream. Or are you?

There will be times when it's not all rosy



With the big move behind us – we may think the worst is over. We get lost in the excitement of living the dream. In the first phase of the move you are likely to see nothing but a world of endless possibilities.

Don't get me wrong, it still can be.

But, I also need to break it to you, that this lovely honeymoon phase wears off.

Which can leave you with a brutal reality, that the routine of life isn't that much different abroad then it was at home. One day, you'll realize that you still get up to go to work, you shop and you have a routine. It looks and feels exactly like our old life. Only worse as someone has removed the age old comforts, favorite haunts, and friends. They may have also changed the channel are all now speaking a new language – that you are not learning as fast enough for conversations past 'hello how are you?'.

It can also be at this vulnerable moment that those nagging doubts we parked before the move come back to haunt us....

Did you make the right decision?

Will this ever feel like home?

And the biggest fear, did you fail your dream or did your dream fail you...

All you may need a coffee and friendly ear, someone to share your doubts and challenges with. A friend to go to the movies with. Or a savvy local to ask for a dentist recommendation.

Whatever you do, don't start tottering on the brink either of moving forward – or going back. See it as an opportunity.

Time to take control and make it 'Home'



If you have lived abroad you may recognize the moment.

It's a wake up call and realization that living abroad is not all cocktails with mini umbrellas on a beach. It's part of the move, and part of being a nomad. When the old life starts to fade away, it's time to replace it with a fulfilling new life.

Up until this point, all your focus has been on work, a place to live, setting up the internet and a hundred other mind-

numbing tasks. So much so that you haven't had the chance to establish a social life.

What you need is a plan of action.

Planning and creating a new home abroad:

To help to motivate yourself make a list on why you moved, and what you love about living where you do. Stick this list some prominent like the fridge. Then make the effort to do those things you enjoy that attracted you to this adventure in the first place.

If you moved for nature, go out and spend time in it. If you are in Argentina and love the tango, then learn it. Whatever it is – put it on your list and into your agenda!

In all honesty, every place has its pros and cons. What we need to do is recognise them and make sure we are balancing them out. We can do this by focusing on the positives, rather than the negatives.

The very best thing that you can do to get you through these moments of doubt is to make **'friends'**. Someone you can grab a coffee with, who can share or add to your perspective. It's always the people you meet, that'll make a foreign country feel like home.

Now Let's get out there and meet people



We all know finding good friends isn't easy, we all know they are valuable and rare. Yet, the world is a pretty big and there are a lot of great places to meet people, with a bit of EFFORT.

The best way to meet like-minded people is through something that you love, common interests. What are your hobbies, are there courses and workshops that you can attend?

A [language exchange](#), is helpful in that it helps to improve your language skills and meet new people. Your exchange partner will also speak your language and is likely to have or plan to travel. A word of caution: be selective of who you choose to meet up with. [Remember the objective – meeting like-minded others', there are those that use the language exchange for an inroad to dating foreigners... and hence may have other objectives....]

It's handy to meet a few established foreigners and locals, which is where international groups such as [internations](#), or [Expatica](#) (Europe) or [Expatriate](#) work a treat as most have local gatherings. You can also find local events through [meetups](#) or a local version of the site.

Getting onto the mailing list of your own embassy in your new country is also worth while, they'll invite you to holiday celebrations and they may also have a chapter of commerce, who will get together for meetings or lunches. Which is a great place for business networking.

If you are shy, force yourself to event – you are not likely to be the only shy person there. It's going to take Effort – you are going to need to go beyond comfort zones. I assure you

it will be worth it.

There are no strangers here, only friends you haven't met yet. Walter Butler Yeats

You'll meet a valuable people at each outing, and a few of these will grow into valuable friendships.

You will find before you know it, you'll have a social life, new hobbies and language skills. You will be going to the movies or hanging out with friends.

Someone will have recommended the perfect doctor, dentist and hairdresser after all word of mouth among peers are the best recommendations.

Now, instead of feeling homesick and full of doubt, you'll feel settled and at home.

The dream you had of living in a new country has become a reality. You can kick back and enjoy the experience and dare we say it, start planning the next move...



