***Pearls of wisdom from a seasoned international Educator/Administrator***!

I was one of those individuals that always wanted to be a teacher: no matter what, somehow I just sort of gravitated toward the profession. So early on in my career, whilst I was based in my home city, I found myself often in the midst of the faculty room complaints about everything from unions, to parents, to lack of ideas and being “too tired for this anymore”. I knew I had a choice….join in….or do something about it…and it was then that I discovered the world of international schools.

That was 15 years ago, and since then, I have really never looked back. Granted I went back to my home country to work for a few years, but it was a different city and it really did not feel like home.

At the risk of simplifying it too much, I think my top ten tips for anyone wanting to “do something about it”, would be: (in no particular order)

1. Do it for the right reasons and never forget the fact that your chosen career has enabled you to travel the world, experience different cultures and work at the same time.
2. Try to avoid choosing places you would want to visit for a holiday: I did this with my first posting…sometimes these places can be the hardest to live in.
3. You are always (and always will be) a guest in the country and culture you work in.
4. Money should not always drive why you would want to work in an international school…sure, in some places it is amazing, but it is not everything!
5. Try to avoid the complaints about the locals….remember you are living in their context and rather than try to avoid it…at least understand it. You will hear colleagues who struggle with this often say “back home….this would never happen”….often this is nothing more than these people feeling a bit homesick!
6. Know that, you will come away from your experience with friends all over the world! I have very close friends who I worked with 12 years ago and who still keep in contact.
7. Never assume that, when you do return home….things will return back to normal….not always the case….many of us, when we do return, go through a period of “oh no…what have I done??!!!”… a perfectly normal reaction.
8. After living overseas for a while, you will value things back home that you never thought you would…it is normally the little things you took for granted….you will look at things back home differently.
9. When you work in an international school, you truly see how families work in different cultures: Classic example of this in my current school is the 6 year old whose parents allow him to catch the tram to and from school each day. You can see the mortified looks of shock on the faces of the parents from other cultures who would simply never even entertain the idea of letting their 6 year old do such a thing…and yet the parents of this child see nothing wrong with it!
10. When you live and work in a different city, you learn to become less of a tourist and more of a local (and although you should never forget you will probably never be the latter!)…you will know this has happened when all of the stereotypes you had about the place/culture/region you are now living in slowly become understandable or do not even exist!

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