

EXPATS IN LUXEMBOURG

INSIGHT INTO EXPAT LIFE

The number of highly skilled expatriates working in Luxembourg has grown continually over the last couple of decades. For all of them, this meant making a new home in Luxembourg far away from their roots. LFF spoke with expats from a range of backgrounds and nationalities about their new life in the country.

Denise VOSS,
Director,

Franklin Templeton Luxembourg



© Thomas Stankiewicz / ONT

THE LUXEMBOURG EXPERIENCE

"There are many of us in Luxembourg who have lived the 'come to Luxembourg for two years, stay forever experience'", says Denise Voss, born in Los Angeles and now Director of Franklin Templeton Luxembourg. That is how the Luxembourg experience can be best described.

Settled in Luxembourg for almost 25 years, Denise Voss's experience in the Grand Duchy started for professional reasons, as it is the case for many other expatriates. "Like so many expats in Luxembourg, I came for a two-year exchange between the Boston and Luxembourg offices of the audit firm

Coopers & Lybrand, now PwC. My exchange partner returned to Luxembourg after his two years in Boston but I knew early on that I wouldn't go back to the States!", she says with a smile.

"Professionally, Luxembourg has been a great experience; being part of a community, which helps and continues to help Luxembourg become the second largest fund centre in the world and the world's largest global fund distribution centre. I strongly believe I wouldn't have had the same opportunities in the US I've had here, in part because of the possibility of being directly involved in developing the fund industry. There is a common goal to work



Rives de Clausen, Luxembourg City

© Ministère de l'économie / ONT



Philharmonie, Luxembourg

towards making the Luxembourg fund industry the best centre for funds", she adds.

The career path of Sweden-native Tonika Hirdman, CEO of the Fondation de Luxembourg, led to the Grand-Duchy in August 2006 when she and her family were considering to move to Asia for a few years. "When I asked about the opportunities within the bank where I was working at that time, the reaction was that at the moment there were no vacancies at my level. However, that same evening, I received a call from our headquarters in Amsterdam asking me if I would consider Luxembourg as an alternative." Having made a few calls to people she knew who had an experience from Luxembourg, she quickly accepted the offer and decided to give it a try for two years. "The two years passed very quickly, and now it has already been over eight years and we are still there", enthuses she.

While previously living in France, Jeff Hicks and his wife Margaret from California, now both partners at the communication agency Optimize Interactive in Luxembourg, had the plan of starting a business in Europe but were unable to obtain permits and visas there. "By chance, our first client in Europe when we started our business was in Luxembourg. We came to service them, and found the country to be very desirable", Jeff points out. This made the trick and convinced them to settle in Luxembourg. "Ultimately we decided to center our European business operations from Luxembourg obtaining banking and licensing requirements. And very importantly, we are able to participate in the social system and have health care coverage", he adds.

Luxembourg is definitely a buzzing international place to work but there is more to it. "It is also one of the few places where you can have an interesting job, and at the same time enjoy the quality of life", points out Tonika.

A trend that is confirmed by relocation agencies. Sylvie Schmit-Verbrugghen is Managing Director of the relocation agency European Relocation Services. "The primary reason for people coming to Luxembourg is for work but they stay because of the quality of life, the rich cultural scene and the multi-lingual environment", she says.

The increasing presence of relocation agencies in Luxembourg reflects the change triggered by the growing influx of foreigners to Luxembourg. "There is a trend for companies to outsource relocation services, because their human resources departments have neither the time nor the expertise to manage the workload", confirms Sylvie.

FEELING THE INTERNATIONAL VIBE

With 71% of its active population being foreigners, Luxembourg is perceived as a true melting-pot where daily life has a genuine European feel.

"I met my future husband through work via connection with the French expats in Luxembourg – so two expats of different nationalities meeting in Luxembourg – another occurrence that is so common here and almost banal!", points out Denise.

► Tonika HIRDMAN

"It is also one of the few places where you can have an interesting job, and at the same time enjoy the quality of life"



Grand Ducal Palace, Luxembourg City

© Claudine Bosseler / ONT

► Denise VOSS

"I don't believe that expats realise how much support the Luxembourg government gives to private schools."



Tonika HIRDMAN,
Director General,
Fondation de Luxembourg



Cycling in Luxembourg City

© Andreas Kern / ONT

More importantly, Luxembourg's international aspect is considered as an integral part of the country's identity. *"As a foreigner you feel really welcome and it is easy to integrate. There was no sense of being 'the new kid on the block'",* explains Jeff.

"Living, working and dealing with people from different countries and experiences is invigorating and once you experience it, it is difficult to give up", adds Denise.

Describing the move to Luxembourg as a "expat light-experience", Tonika emphasises how much the international mentality is reflected in Luxembourg authorities' attitudes. *"There is none of the typical 'them and us' mentality and they are even discussing the possibility of non-Lux citizens to vote in the parliament after five years in Luxembourg",* says she.

A feeling also shared by Jeff who confides that *"because of Luxembourg's compact size, the government is doing a much better job of interacting with their constituent's and managing the infrastructure"*.

To all of them, living in the heart of Europe has many advantages. Multilinguism is being one of the most cherished one, and especially how it enables children to thrive.

SPEAKING YOUR LANGUAGE

"Another plus is raising a child for whom speaking a number of languages and having friends of many nationalities and cultures is 'normal' – I believe it's an enormous advantage to give to a child", explains Denise.

The pluralistic tradition has taken an important place in the Luxembourg school system while language learning over the entire school career accounts for 50% of the curriculum.

For relocation agencies, schooling represents an important part of their services. *"Schooling is the priority number one for expats coming to Luxembourg",* points out Sylvie.

The large and growing number of expatriates has generated the demand for post-primary schools mirroring the multinational background. While offering day-care, fundamental education and post-primary education, the schools' curricula, taught by international staff, are adapted to the multilingual backgrounds and needs of their pupils.

"I don't believe that expats realise how much support the Luxembourg government gives to private schools. It doesn't mean that private school fees in Luxembourg are low or aren't a big line in a household budget but they are significantly less than in most other countries", points out Denise.

EXPERIENCING BOTH WORLDS

Sandwiched between France, Germany and Belgium, Luxembourg is ideally located with easy access to major cities like Brussels, Paris and Frankfurt within two hours. *"In terms of travel possibilities, Luxembourg's central location makes it ideal for travel anywhere on the European continent",* says Jeff enthusiastically.

DIARY

UPCOMING LFF EVENTS



EUROPEAN CAPTIVE FORUM

▶ 11-12 NOVEMBER - LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg for Finance is represented at this two-day captive insurance event with a booth. The forum affords participants a platform to debate and shape the industry's future.

FINANCE AVENUE

▶ 15 NOVEMBER 2014 - BRUSSELS

Luxembourg for Finance will partner with the conference Finance Avenue. In this context, Alain Hondequin, Secretary General of the ABBL, will participate in the panel "Private Banking in Luxembourg, quo vadis".

FINANCIAL MISSION TO BRAZIL

▶ 16-21 NOVEMBER - SAO PAULO / RIO DE JANEIRO

Luxembourg for Finance will head to Brazil for a financial mission, honored by the presence of TRH the Crown Prince and the Crown Princess and led by HE Minister of Finance, Pierre Gramegna.

WORLD ISLAMIC BANKING CONFERENCE

▶ 1-3 DECEMBER - BAHRAIN

Luxembourg for Finance is joining the world's largest gathering of Islamic banking and finance industry leaders and will participate at the event with a booth.

FINANCIAL MISSION MILAN 2014

▶ 02 DECEMBER 2014 - MILAN

Luxembourg for Finance will organise a financial seminar in Milan in the presence of HE Minister of Finance, Pierre Gramegna. The conference will promote various aspects of Luxembourg's financial centre.

> For further information, please contact events@lff.lu



Lake of the Upper Sûre, Ardennes

All these factors add to the country's high quality of life where safety is a key asset. In 2011, Luxembourg City was found to be the safest out of 221 cities worldwide in a Mercer study on personal safety and quality of living.

The regular presence of Luxembourg in international surveys dedicated to life standards reflects well what expats love most about the country. "Our clients love Luxembourg's high standard of living as it is a great place for raising a family and experience the best of both worlds: the buzzing life of the city while being a few miles away from the quiet life of the countryside. You live in a small country with all the advantages of a cosmopolitan city", points out Sylvie.

"My husband and I are always amazed at the ease with which one can go from the bustling city environment into deep forested areas. Natural beauty is Luxembourg's jewel and contributes greatly to the quality of life found here", points out Jeff's wife Margaret.

"When I arrived in Luxembourg, being a daily biker, I was positively surprised by the extensive national network of cycling paths available in Luxembourg", says Tonika.

So what is missing in Luxembourg? "Well, for a Swede, I would say the sea and big lakes. But on the other hand, I am sure that the government will solve this too sooner or later", concludes Tonika with a smile. **OB**