

**NOTES ABOUT AN ONGOING ACTION RESEARCH:
A GUIDE TO EMIGRATION FROM A YOUNG PORTUGUESE GRADUATE**

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Emigration is now both a solution and a problem. To us, the ones wanting and seeking a better life, to emigrate is a solution but to the countries we choose to go, we are (or can be) little more than a problem: they even decide to shut borders or to limit the number of people allowed in and when this is not enough they set requirements: one must speak the language of the chosen country, possess awareness of the cultural background and current politics. It is true that other EU members economy is nowhere near as bad as ours but is equally true that they want it to stay like this.

Starting over is hard. Staring for the first time in a different country is harder. Searching about the place one chooses to go to or speaking fluently the native language does help but won't take you far. It is not enough to simply know how the system works to work your way through it.

In early 2013 I packed my bags, took my partners hand and landed in London. I admit things could be easier if we already had accommodation, a work contract and good savings. But life rarely plays perfect: many people are being forced out of their countries due to poverty, extreme situations, need of independence or other social and economic stressors. The situations are never ideal and the promises of a brand new start may sound sweeter than they are. In Portugal, many feel lucky for having a job and earning the minimum wage. Many students know that that is all they can hope for if they choose to stay in here. For them, just like it was for me once, a work contract in England for £15000~£18000 a year, considering no

qualifications were necessary, was very attractive. Why settle for less than half of this in Portugal? Not only is the amount doubled but the coin is stronger. This is when one needs to start paying close attention to the details and do some research. Most of these are nursing contracts often based either in the centre or around London, a place where a T0 flat alone can cost up to £1000 monthly. And just like that is half a salary gone. Then come the expenses: not many are aware but on top of the rent, one must pay council tax that can go from £80 to £300. Making the math, adding up, rent, council tax, electric bills, water, heating, food, transport and communication bills and your previously attractive salary of £2000 may actually not be enough.

Where and when to go are crucial questions one must ask themselves before allowing the dreams run wild.

This guide focus on United Kingdom but does not approach north Ireland. That said, one can visually split UK in three parts: North, South and London.

In the north there are higher chances to find jobs specially factory, lorry driving or nursing jobs. Lincoln and Doncaster are good examples.

South is populated greatly by elderly people making the need for nursing staff higher. Also, as the warmer coast is good for seasonal work.

London is a big city heavily populated and where everything happens. The demand for every kind of jobs is high but so is the price of choosing to live there.

There are plenty of jobs vacancies throughout England but that doesn't mean they will make it easy for anyone interested.

Regarding when to go it mainly depends if you are chancing to get a seasonal job or if you have an opportunity you are already aware of.

When thinking of the actual paperwork process of immigrating to the United Kingdom one need to exercise caution. It is a plus that you don't need a passport or visa to go, but much more waits after you pass the borders. You won't go far without a bank account but you need an UK address to open one. In order to get an address, you will need a bank account. Somehow you need to break this circle. Here are some examples:

You can ask a friend, if you have one living in the UK, to allow you to use his address temporarily;

Some landlords may ask you for 6 months of rent in advance if you can't provide a bank account. This can amount in the very least £2100 plus the deposit that varies from half to the total of a month's worth of rent. Unfortunately there are many cases of people being taken

advantage of and after the payment they never see the “landlord” again. The safer way is going through an agency but that represents more costs. The agency needs to approve you before even contact the landlord and that process can cost up to £200. If you don’t meet the criteria you will be rejected and the £200 are non refundable.

There are cheaper scenarios: the rooms. If you contemplate this alternative be prepared to share everything in a house except your bed, to deal with noise at any time, quite possibly drug and alcohol dependent neighbours and with the fact that landlords don’t invest in the houses at all and don’t often get involved in social conflicts between tenants. A landlord for a room is possibly earning around £50 per week per tenant so they will provide you with shelter, but that is it. Labelling your food in the fridge may seem sensible but won’t guarantee you it will still be there the next day. Share a room in a family’s house is better, hygiene and house repair wise but you will find difficult bringing friends over and if the family has children there may be even more rules, for example no noise after bedtime.

To buy a house may seem the most attractive option, especially because there is a good offer market and banks make special offers, for example for first buyers. But after some research one will see that the rates are high and the signal you must give is rarely less than £20000 if you are alone or £7000 if there are two people buying. Getting credit form the banks is not easy.

Set your bank account!

After you secure an address there are many advantages in getting a debit card: in any bank company in UK you will not pay annual fees, no matter your age and to end an account, even a joint one, you only need one person as long as the account balance is £00.00. Internet banking is highly encouraged and staff from the bank assists you with this the moment you open an account. Debit bank cards are free even if you lose one and request a replacement. Regarding credit cards, you will need one. In UK, not having a credit card is as bad as having a bad credit score.

Finding work

In order to start working you will need an insurance number. It is not legal to work in the UK without it. Once again, you will need an address in order to apply for an insurance number. The process consists in contacting one of the main Job Centre branches (in the south, contact the Brighton one for example) to schedule an interview, go through some paperwork

regarding personal information and reasons for application and hopefully you will receive a letter between two to three weeks.

After getting an address, a bank account and an insurance number you will need a job. While it is true that there are many jobs available out there, this is the hardest part. All your curriculum vitae, even the ones you learn how to produce at the university, will scream foreigner to any employer. You need to know what kind of CV's to look for when writing one. A friend of mine that works in a job centre read mine, a standard one, and explained to me why I kept being rejected and helped me create a new one that ended up looking more like an essay rather than a list of skills.

This is not defending that what we learn at university is wrong or doesn't work at all. But keep in mind UK is not known to like foreigners very much so the more you scream "outsider" in attitude or paperwork, the worse it is for you.

No matter what your CV ends up looking like, every employer will ask you for at least two references, that can't include friends or family. This is where many emigrants evidently look like outsiders on their CV's, as it is highly unlikely for an emigrant to have a previous UK employer. It is worth it to start doing voluntary work, while you cannot get a proper job, in order to have an UK reference. I was unaware of the need for references and wasted four months of doing absolutely nothing while I could be using that time to improve my CV.

The best chance to get a job, unfortunately, is if you know a friend that has a friend that needs someone to work for him or knows of an opportunity. Going to a job centre may not be what you are expecting. You will enter the building, explain to the receptionist that you are looking for a job and you will be directed to a computer, will be given a link to follow and off you go. This is something you can easily do at the comfort of your house. While it is helpful to follow the database of jobs available online and applying for them online too, it is also good to go out and wander through the streets. In coffee shops, markets and small shops one can find, more often than not, a notice asking for staff. This way you get an advantage from the online application, as it allows you to go visit the place hiring, you can enquire about the job with your almost native English speech and swoop them with your over polite English manners just in the first few minutes. And just like that overcome the foreigner stigma.

Agency work is a good way to start working and to get into the system as they tend to have fewer restrictions when hiring staff but be aware of the irregular work load, understand how taxes will work for them and always compare agencies.

Now, assuming you got a job, is the time you can really shine. It may make little sense but the truth is the English hate foreigners but love the way we work. I thought I could be a bit slow paced and yet, I easily made, in one year, top 3 workers on the hospital unit I work for.

Some colleagues ask me why not go to university again and qualify as a mental health nurse as they seem so sure i would make such an amazing one, and some even joke about me rising up to management. Am I an exceptionally talented mental health nurse assistant? No. I studied translation, something far from the health service. So what do I have that left them so convinced of my work? What do emigrants have that UK citizens don't? First of all, our will to work, the fact that we tend to be punctual and not miss work, we are responsible and we follow rules. Just the first two characteristics will have you being recognized at your work place.

And yet one must be careful of how much are you willing to give from yourself as your workplace can easily run you down, you not always be recognized for what you do and many colleagues will take advantage of your hard work as the more you do, the less they will have to. Many managers care more that the work is done rather than who did it.

Conclusion

To emigrate is a serious decision that cannot be taken lightly. There are many things to consider and the opportunities need to be well thought about. There is much fake publicity and even friends may exaggerate in their personal story telling in order to make you believe they are faring well in their lives. Make an informed decision as it is an experience that it will change you and your views of the world.

Finally, it is not only important to consider what one could be facing but also what one is giving up. Many times I find myself wondering if my financial stability is worth my lacking social and personal life. We can make new friends but they will never have or sometimes even understand the shared experiences we had with our old friends. The sense of freedom from overprotective family members will fade soon and in its wake we are left with an emptiness and yearning. Family meetings become phone calls, meeting the new family member now means an heartbreaking video call. One will miss birthdays and Christmas may even become just another day. Loneliness can gain a new very powerful meaning. Technology has advanced from those war times where people wrote letters and hoped their loved ones received them in about a year if at all, but technology has not advanced enough to satiate our need to touch our loved ones. The option of comfort through touch is simply not available. After a decade of leaving home, emigrants report that the interaction with their loved ones is no longer the same

when they see each other in person, they report an emotional distance that wasn't there before. An irreversible transformation will take place as the person leaving home will learn and adapt to a different culture and identity that will remain foreign to their loved ones. Personal growth is inevitable and valuable lessons are learned in the process, but to emigrate is not easy on anyone's emotions.

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