



A personal note on immigration

Starting all over can be a daunting affair. But it also has its appeal - it's an adventure that requires trust and most of all a lot of practical common sense.

I have always admired those who dare to change their lives around, to leave the relative security of a well-paying job 'just' to follow their passion. New horizons, new relationships, new challenges will be chosen over seeking to maintain a status quo at home. Although staying put in a job or in a marriage can at times demand more energy and courage than leaving it all behind! :)

Over the five or six years that I have had people staying here at Joya, I've noticed that a lot of my international guests have an interest in making New Zealand their new or second home. They generally are looking for a change of lifestyle and over the last year and a half their reasons for coming have also been based on what they fear might happen if they *don't* move - in other words they think of New Zealand of a place to take refuge from the oncoming 'triple whammy' of energy, food and climate crises.

Of course it is beneficial for a country to attract a lot of well-educated people, but then is it is even nicer if they also have a chance to choose whether they'd want to work in their field of expertise or whether they'd be allowed to do something totally different. When I moved here in 2000 the latter was still a possibility. Now, from what I've learnt, one has to have at least 5 years of experience in the same or related field in one's home country. That is, if you want to set up shop on your own. By far the easiest way however is coming in with a job offer in hand. That boosts your points and will help you avoid going through the whole rigmarole of working with agencies.

To some extent New Zealand still is a land of opportunity. Wages are relatively low but it is an entrepreneurial country. There is an appreciation of small-scale businesses and a 'go-do-it' mentality. However, it is getting more and more difficult to find entry in this country. Current figures indicate that 30% of the applications done online get turned down and those numbers are growing.

Nevertheless I would not necessarily say that you need to have an agent do the work for you. I made mistakes in that respect and would like you to have the opportunity to learn from them. Even though you may have the money and you'd be prepared to pay a nice sum for the right sort of help, I doubt you will always get it. And I certainly doubt whether you should leave it up to others to do the work. The best advocate for your situation should be you!

I applied in 2000 and received permission within 3 months which was quite fast. Because I wanted to come in on a Business Visa - which is probably the most 'difficult' category, I hired the services of one of the major international agencies. I had always worked in an independent practice, and as a freelancer. I'd followed my instincts rather than doing any financial goal-setting, so I thought I needed these people in order to put a nice business plan on the table. What I soon noticed, however, is that for this agency it was not easy to really grasp my intentions. Quite a few times I had to correct them in their phrasing and even with the figures, something that I had not expected since figures never were my forte. So after a short time, I no longer felt safe with this agency. From my perspective they were too quick, too sloppy and just didn't deliver. I have heard similar stories since living here.

With a business visa you'll generally get three years to prove your value to the country. By the time I had to apply for residency and 'prove my worth' I had run out of money. So I was more or less forced to be my own advocate and lodge the application myself. I was successful and my kids and I have residency now, even though the first two years of being in business had been a disaster. Close to two years of renovations, the money gone without even having a proper chance to get started, all a result of most likely the biggest mistake I could have made: buying this house too quickly. So, I am one of these people who would truthfully say: "If I would have known what was to come, I would not have done this." On the other hand, if I hadn't made this move my children would have most likely missed out on certain opportunities.

So, before going into unnecessary details about all this personal stuff, let I cut myself short and say this: If you intend to immigrate: visit the country - really, this seems obvious, but not everyone does. New Zealand/Aotearoa - the

Land of the Long White Cloud - has this romantic connotation of being a land of opportunities, unspoilt, and graced with natural beauty. That is only partially true. It is a young country yes, and there is room for pioneers, but 'clean and green'? I wouldn't say so. In fact, you'd be amazed what is allowed in that respect. Endosulfan is one of the worst pesticides still used in New Zealand. It is an old-style organochlorine, related to DDT, banned in over 55 countries but not here. And this is just one example.

Secondly, know yourself. You'll have to know your own strengths and weaknesses at least to some extent and be prepared to learn and be strong, because it generally is not easy to be left to your own devices. I thought of myself as a globetrotter, a woman of the world, with the ability to be creative, flexible and work hard. But again, I had not anticipated living on a building site, having to take people to court and working with no respite whatsoever.

Thirdly, while visiting for a first or second time, check out schools, community services, talk to accountants, and business advice bureaux. Gather as much information as you can. Most of it will be free of charge, you'll notice. Do your medicals here also and only involve an agent or specialised lawyer in case you want to have your paperwork double-checked. That should suffice.

Be prudent regarding real estate. Rent before buying. Get an appraisal, do all the sensible things. I let myself be taken in by a real estate lady, thinking we'd become friends. I finally had to file an official complaint and take her to a Tribunal, which of course was a stressful and thoroughly superfluous measure. Joya, once the respectable home of one of Nelson's mayors, and previously owned by a judge, 'unexpectedly' needed total re-piling, re-wiring, re-plumbing etc - a full year's of renovations not including the garden studio and clinic. I had to learn a lot about building, about consents, and about tricky tradesmen.

Of course, it is quite likely that you'd be more lucky in many, many ways. For me trust was still a big issue, so I had to do a bit of learning there. Your challenges may be of a totally different nature and calibre or you might not have any at all. In case you'd be interested in the Nelson region as your new home you'd be more than welcome to contact me. Or if you are looking for short or long term rentals perhaps you'd be interested in staying here for a while (see www.joya.co.nz) In case you have children I'd be happy to talk to you about schools. Through the work that I do, I am familiar with most primary and secondary schools in the area. Another service Joya has to offer is the one-on-one or group language courses. The Tomatis method has the reputation of being almost twice as fast any traditional course. So, if you have to do your English test and doubt whether you are ready, think of doing Tomatis beforehand (see the [Languages](#) page).

If you end up relatively wealthy compared to those around you, you may stand out - although one of the things that I like about New Zealanders is that they are not easily impressed. Bill Gates and quite a few other celebrities have a home here, but don't create much of a stir. Yet, it is something to be aware of if you have children; they may be bullied for them being different. Bullying is a universal phenomenon of course, but nevertheless, the effects should not be underestimated. Especially since a lot of people consider immigrating because they want a better future for their children. So take note of that and choose the right sort of ambience for you as well as the children.

Think long and hard about the immigrant experience. Can you really do it? Even in the best of circumstances, immigrants in most countries, even friendly, laid-back New Zealand, can have a tough time. Immigrants tend to have more mental health problems and research shows that it takes at least five years to integrate into a new community. So, don't burn your bridges unless you are convinced that this really is the way to go. And if you do, "good on ya," as they say here!

Aroha (Love),

Paulina

P.S. The new Immigration Advisers Licensing Act has come into effect as of May 5th of 2008. It will require anyone providing New Zealand immigration advice to be licensed. So in case you are looking for an agent check whether he/she is properly licensed before you start forking out dollars. This licence is mandatory from May 2009 and for advisers based outside of New Zealand from May 2010.

For more information on these agencies visit www.iaa.govt.nz
But of course you should start off getting info through www.immigration.govt.nz