LIVING AND WORKING OVERSEAS AS A LAWYER

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I would like to briefly describe what I found for opportunities as well as address some possible pitfalls of working overseas. I live in Turkey because I am married to a Turkish national but I also have a degree in Turkish studies and had knowledge of the language before I came over. These factors made my transition here much smoother.

My primary job is to work as lecturer in legal English, American law and international law for a private university in Ankara. As such, I provide native English and experience doing actual legal work, something that many academics here do not have.

Although I am employed as an academic, I also consult for individuals and companies on American legal issues. The Law of Attorneyship in Turkey only controls the practice of the attorneys – those who represent others in court – and not corporate counsel, judges, legal professors, or prosecutors. This also helps me from the aspect that “consultancy” is pretty much not regulated. I am careful to always work through a licensed attorney to avoid any accusations of the unauthorized practice of law.

As a fairly well-educated native speaker of English, I have also opportunities to edit – articles, journals, and books. Although I tend to start within my specialties, I can offer a fairly quick and comprehensive review of the document for people trying to write outside of their native language.

Now regarding pitfalls, it is possible to have a number of different problems but most can be avoided by careful planning.

I have found that here the legal regime can be subtle and difficult for foreigners. Although I have automatic legal permission to work here since I am married to a Turkish national, in practice it can be difficult to obtain and change jobs. As an academic, I am fortunate in that my official work permission comes through the Higher Education Council so that they permission is quicker but also limited in terms of the length of appointment and other restrictions.

It can be tempting to try to work unofficially and I see a lot of Americans here who try to do that but it can present a lot of problems. Often, an American is hired to do a certain job under certain conditions, but after a time, these are changed by the employer unilaterally once they have you hooked. A complaint will often bring a still fine and other adverse actions, so many American who try this just drift from short job to short job – this applies to professionals as well as ordinary workers.

The tax situation is something that also must be addressed. There are often special taxes that apply to foreigners and it can be hard to know these – the American embassy will often not know these because such restrictions don not apply to them.

If I had done bit of advice for someone to prepare for working overseas, I would recommend getting a TEFL certificate because it greatly improves your employment possibilities.