

Passage to India

When expats come to India, the last thing they want is to 'deal' with India. Global Adjustments hand-holds them through the transition

SHARADA BALASUBRAMANIAN

Chennai is far removed from Sweden and Texas. So, when the 50-something Swedish couple Mollernilsons decided to shift from developed economy to developing economy in September 2007, a bit of circumspection and a lot of questions were in order. There were practical posers: how does one get a house, does the water flow 24 hours and is it clean, where are the good medical facilities and good schools? There were cultural conundrums: is it safe to stay out late, are Indians helpful?

Some answers came from friends and colleagues, but it was Global Adjustments —a Chennai-based company that provides relocation and realty services, and cross-cultural training, primarily to expats and NRIs—that did most of the hand-holding. Ericsson, where Jan-Eric was a senior system designer, had a tie-up with Global, the idea being to make it easier for expats to make the transition.

So, even as they were in Texas, his wife, Annette, got an email from Global, informing them about its gamut of services. "We also got a book called *India Calling*, which gave a lowdown on life in India and do's and don'ts," recalls Annette. A few days after reaching Chennai, a Global staffer gave them a guided tour of the city and patiently answered their questions. More importantly, Global helped them find an apartment (five weeks and 10 houses later), set up utilities and employ helpers.

Houses and mindsets

For 47-year-old Ranjini Manian, Chief Executive Officer of Global, this is all in a day's work. It's work that was born out of an a-ha moment. In 1995, Manian was shuttling between India and the US, and she met Joanna Huski, another globetrotter. They teamed up to help people move from the US to India, but at a personal level. Soon, the thought struck Manian: "Why not do this as a profession!" And thus was born Global Adjustments Relocation Services.

The timing couldn't have been better, as the economy was opening up. Global's first

client was Ford, which was setting up a plant in Chennai; Global helped relocate 70 families to India. Since then, it has provided a smooth passage to India to a few thousand expats from 74 countries, including 600 families in 2007-08. It employs 65 employees across six cities (Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata, Mumbai, NCR and Pune), half of whom speak a foreign language, or have lived or travelled overseas. And its client list reads like the parts of a premier stock index: BMW, Dow Chemicals, Ericsson, Fidelity, IBM India, Intel, Motorola and Nokia, to name a few.

For about a decade, Global was essentially a provider of relocation and realty services. So, it helped expats find houses on rent and did all the paperwork. The company sometimes even helped them out with commercial property (Nokia being a notable example). It organised utility services—water, phone, power backups, broadband, cable—for them. It found them maids, drivers and helpers, and helped out with school admissions. They also acted as enablers, from arranging music lessons to giving work leads. Says Annette: "I wanted to work with NGOs working on social upliftment programmes. Global put me on to some NGOs, and now I am able to make a difference."

As Global's engagement with expats grew, so did its understanding of their needs. Says Chief Operating Officer Rajeshwar

FACTS AND FIGURES

Business Relocation and other services to expats

Based Chennai; five other cities

Year of inception 1995

Employees 65

Balasundaram: "About three to four years ago, keeping destination services as an anchor, we diversified into cross-cultural training to sensitise expats to Indian culture." Reflecting that broader coverage, Global Adjustments Relocation Services became simply Global Adjustments. More importantly, it strengthened its one-stop shop positioning, and increased its relevance and duration of engagement with expats to about six months.

As part of its cross-cultural training, Global organises orientation tours of the city, where it takes people around the sights, the landmarks, the shopping centres and other places of daily engagement. Says Balasundaram: "For expats, the first two weeks, the first phase of absorbing, are like a honeymoon period. Then, the frustration starts creeping in, which goes on for about a month-and-a-half. This is the time when they need us the most."

Global does a lot of things with the basic idea of integrating foreigners into India. So, for example, it conducts Tamil classes in Chennai and Hindi classes in NCR.

It brings out a monthly magazine called At A Glance from five cities (excluding Kolkata). The magazine features India, other expat experiences and city-specific cultural listings, and is distributed free of cost and its electronic version is available on the Global website. Also, says Manian: "We have something called a social and business acceleration programme, where we help people network, both for business and socially."

Going places

For providing all these, Global bills the company. Most multinationals, even several Indian companies, have a special relocation budget. They don't mind this spend, as it helps cut the adjustment time for expats. Says Balasundaram: "We assess the

"We address apprehensions: which school should I put my kid in, where are the best medical facilities, what will my wife do..." Ranjini Manian, CEO, Global Adjustments



client's needs, after which we put together a package and quote a fee." The fee is based on the contours of the package (for example, whether it includes cross-cultural training or not), though it is also flexible to an individual's needs. Says Balasundaram: "Packages start from Rs 25,000 and go up to Rs 7 lakh."

Balasundaram refused to reveal revenue or profit numbers, though she did say that the company has grown 100% on a year-on-year basis in the last three years. About 50% of its revenues come from destination services, 30% from advertising in its publications, and the rest from cross-cultural training. Says Balasundaram: "The industry is fragmented. There are people who offer relocation services, there are individual trainers who give cross-cultural training. We offer it as a package."

The business is light on capital investment. All it needs is office space, computers and human resources. Demand for Global's services is buoyant—and growing. According to Balasundaram, there are about 50,000 expats in the country, and their numbers are only going to increase. Obviously, Global wants their custom, not just in its established lines of businesses, but also beyond.

The company plans to extend itself into a host of other initiatives including packing and moving, immigration, taxation, leisure and travel, and financial advisory (for which it has tied up with Citibank). It is also eyeing tier-II cities.

And if the expat inflow numbers and the experience of people like the Mollernilsons is anything to go by, Global will stay popular among the expat community for now at least.

With inputs from Ashish Gupta

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Clients mostly MNCs (like BMW, Dow Chemicals, Ericsson, Fidelity, IBM, Intel, Motorola and Nokia)

Entry barriers Market is fragmented

Big break Relocated 70 families for Ford to India

Plans Packers and movers, immigration, taxation, leisure and travel, and financial advisory