

A TEENAGER'S GUIDE TO MOVING AROUND THE  
WORLD

# FROM RICE TO POTATOES



ANOEK GROOT

# **From Rice to Potatoes**

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Title: From Rice to Potatoes

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Printed by: CopyShop Den Haag

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# Acknowledgements

I am grateful for everyone who has directly and indirectly helped me along the process of producing this book. Firstly I would like to thank my parents for inspiring me to write this book and for providing me with all the experiences and adventures that will last a lifetime, and for maintaining my cultural background as a third culture kid. I would like to thank all of my friends and fellow third culture students who contributed to the making of this book by sharing their experiences and struggles, as well as the things they wished they knew before moving. Without them I would not have been able to have a broader perspective of moving countries. I would also like to thank my personal project supervisor who has supported me throughout the entire process. Finally, I would like to thank the schools I have attended for the rich education I have received and for all of the people I have built relationships with along the way, whether they be mentors, coaches or peers.

# Introduction

Before you start reading this book, let me introduce myself to you. My name is Anoek and I have lived in both Asia and Europe, transferred to a completely different school system, and have met thousands of incredible people across the globe. Moving is tough. It just is. It comes with many ups and many downs and it is almost guaranteed that you will be placed outside of your comfort zone throughout the process, but speaking from experience, it does get better, and even though it may seem like the most chaotic time, normality is closer than you think.

My biggest move was when I was 13; I moved from Malaysia to The Netherlands, which back then didn't seem that scary, both are my home countries, but there were so many things I wish I had known. From the culture shock to the feeling of loneliness in a crowded room, I wish there would have been some sort of guide to tell me what to expect. I transferred into an International School, and I was shocked to see that so many of my peers had experienced the same emotions I felt and it intrigued me to hear some of

their stories they had. Growing up in the international community, there were so many takeaways from my experiences and those of others, and I have become accustomed to the concepts and reality of a third culture student. So taking everything I've learnt, I present to you this book - an attempt to break down the rigorous process of moving abroad and how to make the most out of it, and how to deal with moving from rice to potatoes.



# **Chapter One: Decision Making**

## **REACTING TO AND ACCEPTING THE NEWS**

Sometimes moving can feel completely out of your hands, because most of the time, it is. Almost all expat kids experience moving due to their parents jobs and economic reasons. So when your parents finally make the concrete decision to move, it can trigger some strange reactions. A lot of the time, there are two ways the reaction could go, you could either get excited or extremely sad about it. Assuming you really like the place you are in at that time, and you have a stable friend group, nice place to call home, a school that you enjoy going to, to hear that that comfort zone will be changing and that you need to adapt to a completely new environment may cause anxiety, stress, sadness and sometimes anger - it is totally normal to scream at your parents for a bit, maybe even ignore them for a few days. As teenagers, a lot of our emotions are heightened and we tend to think irrationally sometimes; hearing that there is going to be a change to our lifestyle is a challenge and the first step to the bumpy road ahead.

Some may react differently, and be excited about the new possibilities that come with moving to a new country, even though it is a challenge. Some may react in the middle where they are a bit excited but definitely feel the stress and pressure of having to change environments. Some may be incredibly sad, because the idea of leaving their friends behind is completely tragic. In my experience, I pretty much compartmentalised this and left it to deal with for a later date, assuming I had all the time in the world to accept this later. This was not the case, because before you know it, your parents are house hunting, you are having to tell your friends the news, you need to start packing up your things and soon enough that time I thought I had to process it, flew by. This was not a good way to deal with accepting the news, and the simple fact is that the sooner you accept it, the quicker you will realise that it is inevitable and it isn't as scary as you might think.

The time leading up to your move is one of the most important stages in moving internationally, as it is often very complicated and can add a lot of stress to your life, your siblings, and those of your parents, so please remember to be kind to your parents because I can guarantee you that it is a

ton more stressful for them than it is for you. Acceptance is really important and throughout this book you will see that there are healthy and unhealthy ways to deal with change, and this can have a psychological impact on your well being.

### **SHARING THE NEWS**

After your parents have announced that your family would be moving, there is obviously going to be a number of other lives that will be affected by this: your close friends, teachers etc. Before telling people about your potential move, you need to realise what can be said and what should remain between you and your family, as there are many uncertainties when moving, so be as open as possible with your parents, as it will help you in the long run. It is also important to be open with your feelings and worries with your friends, therefore you should definitely let them know about the move as soon as you are allowed to. Something you need to be prepared for is their reactions. Many people react differently and having been in the international community for a long time, it is very common that people come and go, and over time, it gets easier.

Many kids are warned not to tell too many people about the move before the actual moving date because it causes tension and people may start putting less effort into maintaining your relationships, which makes sense, because from their point of view, it would be a waste since you're leaving anyways. However, breaking the news to those who truly care about you will be difficult, and it may cause some feelings of abandonment from their side or guilt from your side because you are leaving people behind. Thinking back to when I had first told my best friends I was leaving - it really was a fever dream - it wasn't that emotional because none of us were really sure if I was leaving for sure or when I'd be leaving, which is common when moving internationally. We were all in denial for a while and just kept living our lives as normal. When looking at the bigger picture, it is most important that you and your close friends realise that being sad about it is not going to change anything and that you should continue to live your lives to the fullest and make as many memories as you can. The fact remains that the more positive your outlook on this change, the easier it will be for you and those around you. So when you do come around to telling your close friends, mentally prepare yourself for their reaction, as it is a natural thing and

try to remain positive even though it may seem like the hardest thing to do at that point in time.

# Chapter Two: Saying Goodbye

## LEAVING FRIENDS BEHIND

Saying goodbye is never easy, in fact, it is one of the hardest things to do, and the more you care about someone, the harder it is to leave them, but you need to remember that it doesn't mean forever. Saying goodbye to the people around you comes with a lot of anxiety about drifting apart, losing touch, maybe even some good old FOMO (fear of missing out). Luckily for us, it is so easy to stay in touch with people abroad nowadays, with all the social media available to us. You are literally a call away from your old friends and you can send them a quick snap or meme at any time of the day.

The week that I was leaving was so emotionally draining but it was honestly one of the best weeks I had spent with my close friends in Malaysia, and, we had gone on holiday together a month prior to my move to make some epic memories, which is something I highly recommend doing, because spending quality time with your close friends leaves you all with special memories that you can always talk about and cherish. The best thing to do when saying goodbye is to

not overthink it, you need to keep an open mind and remember that you will see them again, whether it be in the summer holidays or the next time you visit them. I was lucky enough to have my best friends visit me in the Netherlands multiple times and we hadn't drifted at all, it was like I had never left. Keep your friends updated on the journey that you are taking because if you don't keep putting effort into those relationships, you won't receive effort in return. The key takeaway from this is that, yes it is emotionally draining and incredibly sad, but remember that it isn't forever and that there are so many ways to remain in contact with your friends.

## **LEAVING ENVIRONMENTS BEHIND**

Another part of saying goodbye is to the actual environment that you live in. In my case, I had grown up in that house, and it was very emotional having to pack up my things and having to see my home all empty. My childhood pets that have passed away throughout the years had been buried in my backyard, and this emotional attachment was a lot deeper than I had anticipated. When my parents had first bought the house they had installed this great green swing, and saying goodbye to these certain spaces was very

difficult. Many of my peers have mentioned that things often get lost in the process of moving and in my case, my parents had planned the moving really well so that none of my things got lost. During the time leading up to the big move, your family and you would have gone house hunting and this would give your parents an idea of what furniture they would be bringing along and what the scale of the move would be. House hunting is fun at the beginning but after a while it becomes tiring, but trust the process, because you will eventually find the right home for you and your family.

Speaking from experience, the easiest way to go about packing things up is to go through your stuff and give away the things you don't need, mark the things that are valuable to you and to organise the generic things like books, clothes, and other random things you would have. Other than that, leave the big things to your parents, because they have it under control. If you are a hoarder, like myself, it is totally okay to bring as many things as you can, but stay mindful of the size of your next home and whether it really is necessary to bring whatever it is you want to bring. You also need to keep in mind that you may be staying in a temporary home for a while, or that your stuff will take longer to arrive than



it takes for you to relocate, so pack a bag with all the essentials that you would need for a few weeks. With clothing, if you are moving to a country that has a completely different climate than the one you have been living in, you can either buy clothing there or shop prior to moving. All in all, trust the process, even if it is stressful, because it will all work out in the end.

# Chapter Three: The Move

## MOVING DAY

Moving Day is by far the most stressful day in this entire experience. Your parents will be tense, your siblings will complain about everything, there will be a whole lot of moving around and stress. Don't worry about this though, because the calmer you stay, the calmer your parents will be, but try not to aggravate them, as this will make things so much worse. During your journey to your new location, spend some time reading about the new city you're moving to, and read up on important things like:

- Key phrases in that language
- Famous places to eat
- Cool touristy areas - this will get you excited about the move
- Main transportation
- The school you will be attending
- Opening and closing times of the main stores
- Neighbourhoods
- The layout of the city

These will help you have a better understanding of the new place you are moving to, and it will really help you in the long run.

Keep in mind that you may have to wait for a while before the shipping of your furniture and all the other things you packed for moving to arrive, and you might also need to stay in a temporary home or hotel for a few weeks before you can actually move into your new home. This period of time is annoying and frustrating because you may realise that you forgot to take something or that you have no place to unpack your stuff. Again, remember that this does not last forever and that things will go back to normal in no time.

## **UNPACKING**

When your things do arrive and you move into your new home it will be really exciting but also stressful on your parents. A good way to relieve stress is to go around and explore the new city that you're in. You should make it a point to find your new favourite hang out spot, favourite restaurant etc. as this will distract you from the stress of waiting for the big things to be unpacked (usually your parents will hire a moving company that will unpack all of

the furniture and big things like that). One of the biggest tips I can give you for unpacking your own things is to do it as soon as possible, because the sooner you have your own space, the sooner you can diffuse and settle down. I really enjoyed designing my room and making it my own, because the sooner this was done, the sooner I had my own space to do things and to chill out in. It is very important to make your bedroom your own space because this is where you spend a lot of your time and having a positive space can give you a more positive outlook on your daily affairs.

## **INITIAL EMOTIONS**

Once you have passed the actual moving day, the biggest part of the process is done and over with and there will be an abundance of emotions felt in this time period. It is totally okay to be frustrated and sad about leaving your previous home, but there is so much more to come and the best way to go about this is to document your emotions in a journal - I found that this was the best way to output my emotions, as personally I find it quite difficult to articulate how I feel, and having a source of output was a healthy way to deal with the change. You may also experience what many expats call the 'honeymoon' period where it almost feels like you are on

holiday, which creates a sense of denial, which can lead to an unhealthy way of coping with change. The moment your brain makes the distinct change between feeling like you're on holiday to realising you won't be going 'home' is the moment you will feel a huge rush of emotions; be prepared for this, and stay aware that you won't always feel this way.

# **Chapter Four: Culture Shock and Adaptations**

If you ask anyone who has ever moved internationally what the biggest aspect of moving was, the chances that they say culture shock are extremely high. What even is culture shock? Culture shock is the feeling of uncertainty, confusion, or anxiety that people experience when visiting, doing business in, or living in a society that is different from their own. Every country and region has its own significant cultures and social norms, so culture shock is a guaranteed occurrence when moving abroad because you will most likely be unfamiliar with the local customs, language, and acceptable behaviour. As discussed previously, there will be a 'honeymoon' phase when you first move, and this will eventually wear out and you will be left increasingly irritated and disoriented, and all of the misunderstandings will grow tiring. One of the biggest factors to culture shock is the inability to effectively communicate and interpret what others mean, which causes a lot of frustration. Alongside this you may face homesickness and depression because of the longing for familiarity and comfort.

Culture shock can take a lot of time to overcome and adapt to, but as time goes on, you gain better navigation of your surroundings, you make new friends and everything becomes a little more comfortable. This period of adjustment and adaptation comes with the final stage of culture shock, and you get left with acceptance. Acceptance is different for everyone and it doesn't mean that everything is completely understood, it just means that there is a realisation that there doesn't need to be complete understanding in order to feel comfortable in a foreign social environment.

## STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

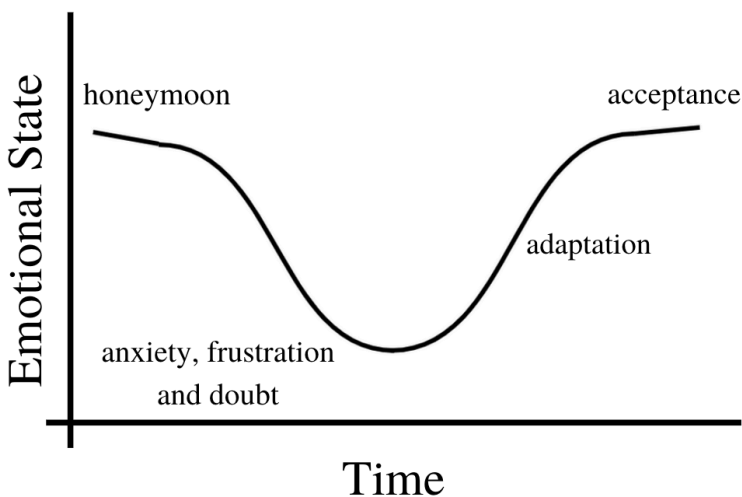


Fig. 1: *Diagram showing the emotional states you go through during culture shock and how they change over time*

Breaking this process down for expat teenagers, it is a lot more intense than for adults because of the social anxiety that comes with puberty. Firstly, you will be attending a new school, which can bring an array of discomfort because of the worry that you won't make friends, or that you will find yourself sitting alone, but trust me, this is all part of the process and it is so much worse in your head than it is in real life. When I moved to the Netherlands I switched school systems from the British Curriculum to the International Baccalaureate system and this was a huge change for me; to be frank, I had no idea what was going on. But slowly I got used to the new system and spoke to many new people and made many friends that I am now extremely close with. A tip to avoid the confusion when moving school systems is to read up on what the key components of the new school system that you will be attending are and what school life is like.

### **MAKING NEW FRIENDS**

The difficulty of making new friends can vary from person to person. If you find that you are an extrovert and are easily sociable, this will be a breeze, but if you are more introverted, it may cause a lot of discomfort and anxiety to



go up to people and introduce yourself. The best thing to do in this situation is to just be kind to everyone and try to make as many new connections as you can, and BE YOURSELF! It is so easy to get caught up in thinking about what people think about you but the simple truth is that people are actually a lot nicer than you think and if they don't like you for who you are, that's fine, you can move on and make new friends. You need to keep an open mind and positive attitude, because if you radiate negative energy, you will get negative energy in return. Having been in the international community for many years, people generally try to introduce themselves to new students as often as they can because they know how daunting it is being the new kid. Overall the easiest way to make friends quickly is to just find common ground and be kind to everyone - don't try to stir drama because chances are that these friend groups are pretty tight knit, if you disrupt them there probably won't be a good outcome.

Due to there being such close friend groups, you may find yourself feeling lonely in a crowded room, or like you're listening to someone but the conversation is meaningless. It is normal to feel this way when first arriving in a new

school, because no one knows you and there is no common ground yet. However, think about it like this, you have a completely clean slate and can start over, and no one can judge you from your past because they simply would have no idea. It *is* scary to walk into the cafeteria not knowing who to sit with, but just go with the flow and don't stress about what others think about you, because eventually you will find a group of people you really click with, and once you do, the anxiety and stress will reduce by a ton.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Another part of the frustration can come from not understanding the people around you in your new environment, which is completely normal. You will eventually learn how to communicate effectively, and nowadays it is so easy to use a translating application to put across what you are trying to communicate. There will also be a lot of lifestyle changes. For example, when I lived in Malaysia the main form of transportation were cars and our driver would send us to school (similar to many other expats living in Asian countries) but when I moved to the Netherlands I had to bike to school everyday and use public transportation to get to the city centre. With this new

lifestyle I found that I had a lot more freedom, which was an upside to moving and I really enjoy being able to get around without having to ask my parents to send me around. I also found that people communicate a lot differently in Europe, especially the Netherlands, then in Asia; people are a lot more straight forward and blunt, which some people may find uncomfortable.

With moving to another society you may face discrimination if you are unlucky. Discrimination is a huge issue that many people face everyday and it may really hurt if you have never had to deal with it before in your home country. There isn't really a way to successfully deal with discrimination, because it just happens, the best thing you can do is ignore it. Growing up mixed raced there has always been a certain extent of discrimination from both my home countries, but I have grown to ignore it because it doesn't define me at all, and the sooner you realise that the better off you'll be.

### **TIPS**

All of these factors play into culture shock and adaptation, and time will help deal with it. Some tips to absorb the shock at a high speed would be to:

- Try to learn about the new culture you are surrounded with.
- Try not to think too much of home and avoid constantly comparing it with your new home.
- Put yourself out there, don't stay holed up at home.
- Ask for advice and help from those who have moved before.
- Talk about your own culture and find a good middle ground.

It is okay to feel homesick and over time you will find that you have adapted your lifestyle to find new comfort zones and build new and strong relationships with people.

# **Chapter Five: Settling Down and Enjoying Your New Life**

## **FINDING A ROUTINE**

After adapting to your new surroundings, you would have already gone past the hardest stage of moving and it's only up from here. Your happiness levels really are up to you, as the sooner you adapt and get used to your new environment, the sooner you will find comfort, routine and normality. This process can take anywhere between a few weeks to years, depending on the person. Schools usually say it takes six weeks for a student to fully feel comfortable and caught up in a new school. After getting through the worst stages of culture shock you can start adding things to your daily life to support a routine like lifestyle. For example, think about joining extracurriculars (these are great for university applications), sports clubs, volunteer work and anything additional to your school life. Obviously when you first move you wouldn't want to immediately join sports clubs or other extracurricular activities because it may seem overly stressful, but the sooner you put yourself out there, the

sooner you will make new friends and find a comfortable routine.

For me, one of the best things I did after moving was joining a swimming club, because it was a huge aspect of my life in Malaysia and I didn't want to lose touch with the sport, so I joined a swim club after a few months of living in The Hague, and I have been in the swim club ever since, as it is a great way to relieve stress and release energy, as well as make new friends. Service as Action is a key component of the IB programme, and I found that volunteering at different places in my city helped me learn how to navigate myself better and communicate easier with the locals, so I highly recommend volunteering at shelters or homes in your new city.

### **GO OUT AND HAVE FUN**

A key thing to remember is to enjoy your new life, and make the most of it. Go on bike rides, go on walks, try all the Italian restaurants near you to see which has the best pasta, go to parties and have fun. You may even implement some of the culture and traditions from your previous home to your new home and introduce your new friends to some of

the things you used to do before you moved - this will help with feeling homesick. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there and build strong relationships with people. It is common for expat teens to be quite guarded around others because of the fear that they will leave again and it won't have been worth it, don't do this, it is very unhealthy and you will never be happy if you don't expose yourself to those around you.

### **THE EXPAT BUBBLE**

The truth with being an expat teen is that you are almost in a bubble, surrounded by other expats (depending on the type of school you go to, in my case, I was surrounded by people who were constantly on the move) and there isn't really a way to break this bubble. In Malaysia I was also stuck in this bubble where my lifestyle was completely different to that of an average Malaysian child, and my parents often concealed these less developed parts of the city. It is your choice if you want to break the bubble or not, in my opinion, I don't see the need to break this bubble, because I found it a safe comfort zone where I could relate to my peers. Once you are settled in, you can start planning your trips to your previous home to visit friends and family, or they could

## THE EXPAT BUBBLE



Fig. 2: *Illustration of the expat bubble*

come visit you, and this is always so much fun and something you should look forward to after settling down.



# Chapter Six: Moving On

## THIRD CULTURE KIDS

Many of the expat teens that move abroad find themselves fitting under the category of third culture kids. You are probably thinking to yourself, what the heck are third culture kids?

## THIRD CULTURE KIDS

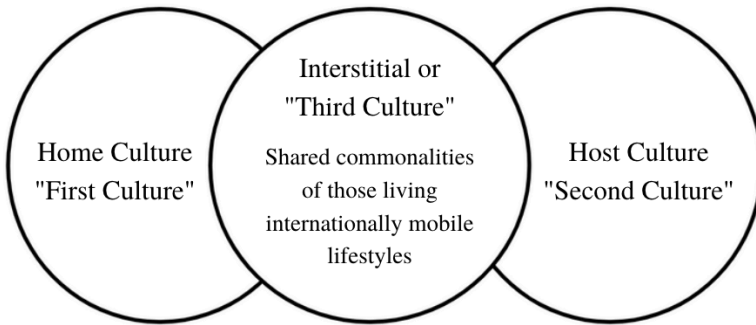


Fig. 3: *Diagram showing the cultures that are combined to form a third culture kid*

A third culture kid is defined as a person who has spent a significant part of their developmental years outside of their parent's culture, and this builds relationships between multiple cultures, while not having full ownership of any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into their life experiences, their sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background, which links

back to the expat bubble. When asking a TCK where they come from, the answer will probably be all over the place. As a third culture kid myself, I can definitely say that there are many upsides to being a TCK. Even though it may feel like I am an outsider in some communities, being a TKC has left me with a lot of exposure to different cultures and has taught me how to appreciate the different cultures. It has also made me very conscious of global affairs and has opened up so many opportunities for me. I would assume that you are a TCK too. If you want to read up on TCKs I would recommend David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken's book called *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*, as it is an insightful book that explores the experiences of TCKs. Moving internationally gives you more perspectives on the world around you and allows you to interpret things from different angles than a person who would have lived in one place their entire life.

Some people may argue that growing up as a teenager internationally may result in loss of confidence, but I would argue the opposite. When you are constantly put in new situations, you grow thicker skin and you mature a lot quicker than regular kids. An upbringing with an abundance of international experiences is a lot more rewarding than you may think. Survey's show that TCKs are four times more likely to have a bachelor's degree compared to non-TCKs.

Below is an adapted table from Pollock and Van Reken’s book outlining the main benefits and challenges you face as a third culture kid.

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Expanded worldview	“Where is home?”
Resilience	Unresolved grief
Cross-cultural enrichment	Ignorance of home culture
Adaptability	Lack of true cultural balance
Ability to blend in	Accentuating differences
Importance of now	Difficulty making decisions
Independence	Feeling choiceless
Cross-cultural skills	Rootlessness
Cultural bridges	Restlessness
Observational skills	Difficulties with identity formation
Empathy	Difficulties with the sense of belonging
Social savvy	Insecurity
Bi(multi)lingualism	Not proficient in mother tongue
Deep relationships	Fear of attachment
Many friends	Many relationship losses
Early maturity	Delayed adolescence
Ability to deal with crises	Emotional withdrawal
Communication skills	Feeling different
Educational opportunities	Lack of full ownership of any culture

Moving on is the acceptance of the challenges you have faced and realisation of the skills you have learnt throughout your international journey. With time and habit, you will move on and the the emotional rollercoaster will come to a halt.

# Conclusion

The making of this book was for my IB MYP personal project 2021. My goal for my personal project was to research the stages of moving and produce a short book that acts as a guide for international students on moving countries frequently, encompassing the emotional impacts felt throughout the process. Hopefully this book will have helped you understand the process of moving a little better and allowed you to realise that moving seems a lot scarier than it is. If I have succeeded, you will have realised that there are many healthy ways to deal with moving, and many benefits to the third culture kid lifestyle. Moving is one of the most daunting things a teenager may face, but when you break it down, the emotional ride that you go through is completely normal, and it won't last forever - human beings are amazing at learning to adapt.

To conclude, I hope you continue your journey with an open mind and positive outlook, because moving from rice to potatoes isn't as bad as it may seem.





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