Max Paradox

PROBLEM? RELAX. YOU'VE GOT THIS!

A tongue-in-cheek guide series ;)

I Moved Abroad and Suddenly I'm an Adult from Scratch

How to Build a Daily Life, a Network of People, and a Sense of Competence in a New Country Without Comparing Every Day to the Life You Already Knew



We've got a problem. But relax.
It can be solved—and we'll even have something to laugh about.

I Moved Abroad and Suddenly I'm an Adult from Scratch

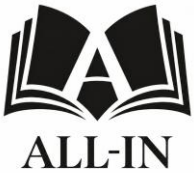
How to Build a Daily Life, a Network of People, and a Sense of Competence in a New Country Without Comparing Every Day to the Life You Already Knew

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ALL-IN Rafał Płonkowski



CONTENTS

INTRO 5

Chapter 1 - Who Switched Off My Adult Settings? 11

Chapter 2 - Your Old Life Has an Excellent Public Relations Department 20

Chapter 3 - The Invisible Rulebook Nobody Gave You 29

Chapter 4 - I'll Start Living Properly Once Everything Is Settled 38

Chapter 5 - I'll Start Talking When I Stop Sounding Like a Broken Translation App 49

Chapter 6 - A Phone Full of Contacts and Nobody to Call 58

Chapter 7 - Your Money Has Moved Abroad Without Reading the Instructions 68

Chapter 8 - One More Search and I'll Finally Be Ready to Deal With It 78

Chapter 9 - Build a Week That Doesn't Require You to Reinvent Your Life Every Morning 89

Chapter 10 - Finding Help Before You Need It 98

Chapter 11 - I Was an Expert Back Home. Here, They Want to Know If I Can Use a Spreadsheet. 108

Chapter 12 - Two Countries, One Phone, and Unlimited Guilt 119

Chapter 13 - Stop Being a Visitor in the City Where You Live 130

Chapter 14 - You Don't Need 100 Percent Certainty to Make a Good Decision 142

Chapter 15 - When Everything Goes Wrong at Once, and Your Support Network Lives Abroad.....153

Chapter 16 - Why a Bad Tuesday Can Make You Feel Like a Newcomer Again.....163

Chapter 17 - When One of You Is Building a Life and the Other Is Planning an Escape.....173

Chapter 18 - The Life You Built Needs Maintenance, Not Another Reinvention.....183

Chapter 19 - You Don't Need an Official Invitation to Feel at Home.....193

Chapter 20 - You're Not Starting from Scratch Anymore. You're Living Your Life.....203

INTRO

At 9:17 on a Wednesday morning, you are standing at a reception desk trying to prove that you live in the apartment where you have been sleeping for the past three weeks. The receptionist needs a document showing your address. You explain that you have a rental agreement. Unfortunately, that is not the right document. You suggest a bank statement. Unfortunately, you cannot open the relevant bank account until you complete another registration process. The receptionist remains perfectly polite. You remain perfectly confused. Somewhere in the middle of this conversation, you remember that you once managed complicated projects, paid taxes, negotiated contracts, and generally functioned as a competent adult. Now you are being defeated by the administrative equivalent of a dog chasing its own tail. The dog, apparently, has a permanent residence permit.

Moving abroad has an extraordinary way of making experienced adults feel like poorly trained interns in their own lives. You may have organized an international relocation, found employment, transported your belongings, and navigated an unfamiliar housing market. Those are significant accomplishments. Yet the moment you arrive, ordinary activities become surprisingly demanding. You cannot find the correct form, understand a local abbreviation, or work out why a perfectly reasonable request has produced three different answers. Even buying something simple can involve discovering an unwritten rule that everybody else seems to have known since birth. The strangest part is that none of these difficulties necessarily reflects your actual abilities. You have not become less

intelligent. You have simply arrived somewhere your experience does not automatically provide the answers.

Back home, you possessed something extremely valuable that rarely appeared on your résumé: an enormous collection of practical knowledge. You knew which institutions handled particular problems, how people generally communicated, what constituted a reasonable price, and whom to contact when something went wrong. You understood the small signals that made daily interactions predictable. Much of this knowledge had become so automatic that you no longer recognized it as knowledge. Moving abroad removes that invisible support system. Suddenly, tasks that once required almost no attention demand research, concentration, and sometimes considerable courage. Your existing skills remain useful, but they now have to operate in unfamiliar surroundings. It is rather like being an excellent musician who has been handed an instrument with all the controls rearranged.

Naturally, your first instinct may be to work harder. You decide to learn the language faster, research every procedure, become more outgoing, and master the entire country before the end of the month. Your phone fills with educational applications. Your browser acquires forty-seven tabs. You create ambitious plans that would challenge the administrative capacity of a medium-sized government. Unfortunately, learning to live somewhere is not the same as completing an intensive training course. Much of what makes a place familiar develops through repetition, relationships, unexpected difficulties, and ordinary experience. You cannot download ten years of local knowledge over a weekend, regardless of how

enthusiastically the internet advertises its productivity techniques.

Another temptation is to measure everything against the life you left behind. Your former city had familiar streets, established friendships, and solutions you could rely on. Your new surroundings offer uncertainty, awkward introductions, and occasional conversations in which your personality seems to disappear somewhere between your vocabulary and your pronunciation. The comparison feels convincing because you are comparing things you genuinely experienced. But it leaves out one crucial detail: your old life took years to develop. Your new one has barely begun. Expecting identical comfort immediately is like moving into an empty apartment and becoming disappointed that it does not already contain twenty years of memories, furniture, and people who know exactly how you take your coffee.

That does not mean the difficulties are imaginary or that homesickness should be dismissed with an inspiring quotation. Leaving familiar people and places can involve genuine loss. Some opportunities available in your previous country may not exist where you live now. You might struggle with employment, money, discrimination, family responsibilities, or rules that significantly affect your choices. Not every problem can be solved through better planning or a more positive attitude. Sometimes you need professional advice, institutional support, or a serious reconsideration of your circumstances. The purpose of this book is not to persuade you that every move abroad is wonderful. It is to help you understand your situation clearly enough to make useful decisions without treating every difficulty as evidence that you have failed.

One particularly difficult part of the experience is rebuilding your sense of competence. At home, you may have been the person everybody asked for help. Abroad, you might hesitate before making an appointment, joining a conversation, or questioning a confusing instruction. You start avoiding situations where you could appear uninformed. Unfortunately, avoiding unfamiliar experiences also reduces your opportunities to become familiar with them. This is where small, deliberate actions matter. Learning how to handle one recurring problem, preparing for a necessary conversation, or discovering a reliable source of information can remove a surprising amount of uncertainty. The aim is not to know everything. It is to become increasingly capable of finding out what you need.

Then there are people. A new country can contain millions of residents and still feel remarkably empty when you have nobody to call on an ordinary Friday evening. Making friends as an adult requires more than being friendly. Established social circles have their own histories, routines, and obligations. You cannot manufacture closeness on demand, and attending one gathering does not automatically produce a lifelong friendship. Building relationships takes opportunities for repeated contact, appropriate initiative, and room for other people to make their own choices. You will learn to recognize how casual connections can develop into something more meaningful, without turning every pleasant conversation into a formal application for the position of Best Friend.

The practical side of life matters just as much. Money behaves differently in a new economic environment. Workplaces have expectations you may not immediately recognize. Healthcare, housing, transport, and administrative

services have their own systems, which vary by country and sometimes by region. You need to understand the rules that apply to you rather than relying on reassuring stories from someone whose circumstances may be completely different. Equally important, you need a daily routine that does not consume all your energy. Moving abroad should not sentence you to a lifetime of solving logistical puzzles before breakfast. Eventually, you deserve ordinary days when things simply work.

There is no single timetable for reaching that point. Someone with secure employment and family nearby will face different challenges from someone arriving alone with limited savings. A fluent speaker may struggle socially, while a beginner in the language may develop a wonderfully supportive network. Progress will be uneven, and some weeks may feel disappointingly familiar to your earliest days abroad. What matters is learning to distinguish a temporary setback from a genuine problem requiring attention. You do not need to turn every uncomfortable feeling into an emergency, but neither should you ignore difficulties that threaten your health, safety, finances, or basic stability.

As you read, consider one situation from your recent life that made you feel unusually helpless. Perhaps you misunderstood an instruction, postponed an important task, or avoided contacting someone because you were uncertain about the local expectations. Instead of concluding that you are terrible at living abroad, ask what was actually missing. Was it information, language, experience, time, money, or access to the right person? Different obstacles call for different responses. Naming the obstacle accurately will not magically solve it, but it gives you something more useful to

work with than the vague suspicion that your entire adulthood has malfunctioned.

Eventually, something wonderfully unremarkable will happen. You will navigate an unfamiliar situation, deal with a minor complication, or help another newcomer understand something you once found bewildering. You may not even notice what it means. You will simply get on with your day, because the new country has gradually become the place where your ordinary life happens.

You did not lose your adulthood when you crossed the border. You brought it with you, along with experience, judgment, abilities, and a few habits that may need updating. What you are building now is the knowledge, confidence, and human connection that allow those qualities to work in a different environment.

And when you finally manage to prove your address to the receptionist, you may discover that the next form asks you to confirm it again.

Welcome to adult life abroad. At least this time, you know what the question means.

Chapter 1 - Who Switched Off My Adult Settings?

The trouble begins with a broken chair. One of its legs has finally surrendered after months of suspicious wobbling, and you decide to dispose of it responsibly. Back home, this would have been a minor household task. Here, you discover that furniture disposal involves a municipal website, a collection schedule, several categories of waste, and something called a household access number. You cannot determine whether the chair qualifies as bulky waste or a recyclable household item. After twenty minutes, you are no closer to getting rid of it, although you have learned considerably more about regional environmental policy than you ever intended. The chair remains in your hallway, looking smug. For the first time in your adult life, you feel intellectually outmatched by a piece of furniture that cannot even stand up properly.

This is one of the peculiar humiliations of moving abroad. You may have spent years solving complicated problems, managing responsibilities, raising children, or making important financial decisions. Then you arrive in a different country and discover that ordinary competence has become strangely unreliable. You misunderstand a delivery instruction, select the wrong option on a payment terminal, or spend an entire afternoon trying to establish which office handles a simple request. None of these situations is particularly impressive in isolation. Together, however, they can create the disturbing impression that you have somehow become less capable. You remember being the person who knew what to do. Now you are the person quietly studying

everyone else's behaviour and hoping nobody asks you a question.

The discomfort becomes stronger when your previous identity depended on being resourceful. Perhaps you were the family member who arranged everything, the colleague who understood complex procedures, or the friend people called when they needed practical advice. Those roles formed part of how you understood yourself. Suddenly, you require explanations that seem embarrassingly basic. A helpful neighbour demonstrates something that local teenagers probably do without thinking, and you feel obliged to explain that you are normally quite intelligent. Of course, announcing your intelligence while struggling with a door-entry system rarely creates the dignified impression you were hoping for. The real problem is that you are treating unfamiliarity as evidence of personal inadequacy.

You have not lost your abilities. You have lost your shortcuts.

Much of everyday competence consists of knowledge that no longer feels like knowledge. You know which questions matter, which details can be ignored, and which apparent problems are entirely normal. You recognise familiar institutions and can usually predict what will happen after completing a particular step. This allows you to make ordinary decisions quickly, without carefully analysing every possibility. When you relocate, many of those shortcuts stop working. The underlying abilities remain, but the environment no longer supplies familiar signals. You can still compare alternatives and make sensible decisions. What you lack is some of the local information required to evaluate them.

Consider someone who has been driving confidently for twenty years and moves to a country with unfamiliar road markings, parking rules, and administrative requirements. Their driving experience remains valuable, but it does not automatically explain every local restriction. They need to learn the applicable rules before relying on old habits. The same distinction applies to employment, household services, education, and ordinary social interactions. You may understand the purpose of a procedure perfectly well while remaining unfamiliar with how that procedure is organised locally. Recognising this difference changes the question from "Why can't I manage this?" to "Which part of this system do I need to understand?"

That second question is more useful because it suggests a manageable action. Suppose you have difficulty arranging an appointment. Is the problem that you cannot find the responsible provider, cannot understand the booking system, or cannot communicate what you need? Each obstacle requires a different response. Searching for more vocabulary will not help much if you are contacting the wrong organisation. Reading detailed service regulations will not improve your confidence if the only difficulty is making a short telephone call. When you identify the actual missing piece, you can direct your effort towards it instead of treating the entire situation as one enormous failure of adulthood.

This becomes particularly important when frustration begins spreading from one task to another. You fail to complete an online registration, then remember yesterday's confusing conversation and last week's unsuccessful attempt to arrange a delivery. Soon you are no longer annoyed about registration. You are questioning whether

moving abroad was a terrible decision and whether you will ever feel competent again. Your mind has taken three unrelated inconveniences and assembled them into a comprehensive performance review. Unfortunately, it has appointed itself both the investigator and the disappointed supervisor. Separating the incidents helps prevent that escalation. Three unfamiliar procedures are three unfamiliar procedures, not necessarily evidence of a defective personality.

Stop making every unfamiliar task equally important

When almost everything contains some degree of uncertainty, it is tempting to investigate everything immediately. You begin researching local recycling arrangements and discover information about residential permits. That reminds you to check the rules surrounding your insurance. While searching, you find an article about a registration requirement that may or may not apply to your circumstances. An hour later, you have twelve browser tabs open and have completely forgotten the original broken chair. This kind of wandering research can feel productive because you are learning things. But learning information and resolving an actual problem are not always the same activity.

A better approach is to consider the consequences of remaining uninformed. Matters involving legal deadlines, personal safety, essential finances, employment conditions, or healthcare may require prompt attention and careful verification. Other uncertainties can safely remain unresolved for a while. You do not need to discover the most efficient grocery shop, understand every local custom, and memorise the public transport network during your first month. Some questions become relevant only when you

encounter the situations they concern. Learning information in response to a genuine need is often more useful than attempting to prepare for every possible event in advance.

Of course, there is an important limit to this approach. If your residence status, employment rights, insurance coverage, or another significant obligation depends on particular requirements, you should verify them through reliable sources before a problem develops. Regulations vary considerably between countries and individual circumstances. Advice from someone who completed a similar procedure several years ago may be outdated or inapplicable. Where the consequences are serious, a relevant public authority or qualified professional is more useful than the confident opinion of a stranger who begins every explanation with "Trust me, I know how it works."

For ordinary tasks, however, you can give yourself permission to learn gradually. Choose one recurring difficulty and establish a solution that you can use again. If a particular payment system confuses you, understand the steps required for the transactions you actually make. If collecting deliveries regularly causes problems, find out how notifications, identification, and collection points operate. You are not attempting to earn a degree in the infrastructure of your adopted country. You are making tomorrow slightly easier than yesterday. That modest ambition is surprisingly powerful when repeated across hundreds of everyday situations.

One practical habit is to preserve information that took genuine effort to discover. Keep the official source for an important procedure, a useful contact number, or a clear explanation of a recurring requirement. Include the date when information might change. Avoid constructing an

enormous reference archive containing every detail you encounter. If maintaining your notes becomes a second occupation, you have merely relocated the problem. The purpose is to prevent repeated confusion over the same issue, not to establish a private Ministry of Everyday Affairs with yourself as its only exhausted employee.

Asking questions without surrendering your independence

One of the most expensive habits you can develop abroad is refusing assistance because you believe competent adults should already know the answers. You spend an evening struggling with something a colleague could explain in two minutes. You hesitate to contact a service provider because the question sounds too simple. You would rather waste time than risk appearing inexperienced. This can feel like independence, but it is frequently pride disguised as responsibility. Knowing when to seek reliable assistance is itself a practical skill. The important distinction is whether receiving help enables you to act more effectively or leaves you permanently dependent on someone else.

Imagine a colleague offering to complete an unfamiliar workplace procedure on your behalf. Accepting may solve the immediate difficulty, especially when time is short. But if the same task will return regularly, ask whether they can explain the important steps while working through it. You might say, "Could you show me where the instructions are? I'd like to handle this myself next time." Such a request respects the other person's time while helping you acquire useful knowledge. It also avoids the awkward arrangement in which one increasingly busy colleague becomes your unofficial personal administrator simply because they once demonstrated unusual patience.

Questions are easier to answer when they are specific. "How does everything work here?" requires an entire civilisation to explain itself before lunchtime. "Where can I check the official requirements for this application?" is considerably more manageable. If language makes communication difficult, prepare the central question in advance and ask for important information in writing when appropriate. You do not need an elegant vocabulary to request clarification. You need enough understanding to act safely and correctly. Especially with contracts, medical instructions, and significant financial commitments, pretending to understand is a much greater problem than openly acknowledging uncertainty.

You should also recognise that other people's willingness to help varies. A friendly neighbour may enjoy answering occasional questions but have no interest in becoming your permanent guide. An overworked employee may respond impatiently even when your request is perfectly reasonable. Neither reaction determines your worth. If a particular source is unhelpful, consider whether another legitimate source is available. At the same time, do not interpret every obstacle as something that can be overcome simply by asking more politely. Some services are genuinely difficult to access, and certain situations require formal complaints, specialist support, or alternative arrangements.

Confidence grows through evidence, not declarations

You cannot reliably rebuild confidence by standing in front of a mirror and announcing that you are a highly capable international adult. Your reflection may agree enthusiastically, but it cannot explain the local billing system. More dependable confidence develops when you accumulate evidence that you can handle unfamiliar

situations. You encounter a problem, identify what is missing, obtain suitable information, and complete a necessary action. Sometimes the result is imperfect. Perhaps it takes longer than expected or requires assistance. Nevertheless, you have learned something that makes the next encounter more manageable.

This is why small accomplishments deserve attention without being inflated into extraordinary achievements. You successfully arranged an appointment, understood an unfamiliar notification, or solved a household problem without unnecessary expense. None of these events requires a celebratory speech. They do, however, contradict the broad claim that you cannot function independently. If you are struggling with your confidence, periodically consider which situations have become easier since your arrival. Look for specific examples rather than relying entirely on how capable you happen to feel that day. Emotions fluctuate, especially during stressful periods. Practical knowledge usually remains available even when your mood is uncooperative.

Progress will also be uneven. Someone can become highly confident at work while continuing to struggle with social communication. Another person may build a supportive community quickly but find financial administration bewildering. If you live with a partner or family, different members may become familiar with different systems. Sharing the knowledge matters, particularly when one person has gradually assumed responsibility for every appointment, account, and official document. A household becomes more resilient when essential information is not locked inside one person's head. That does not require everyone to perform every task

equally often, but it helps prevent ordinary absence from turning into a logistical emergency.

There will still be days when you are tired of learning. After spending hours processing unfamiliar language, expectations, and routines, even a simple problem can feel unreasonable. On those evenings, postponing a non-urgent task may be sensible. Rest is not evidence that you have abandoned your development. You are not required to improve your adaptation skills every waking hour. Once your essential obligations are under control, you are allowed to have an ordinary evening that contributes absolutely nothing to your understanding of local administration.

Eventually, the important change is not that every unfamiliar situation disappears. It is that an unfamiliar situation stops automatically threatening your identity. You can admit that you do not know something without feeling compelled to defend your entire professional and personal history. You can ask a question, check a reliable source, or decide that a matter can wait. You have learned to distinguish the practical problem in front of you from the much larger story your embarrassment would like to tell.

And the broken chair? You eventually discover the appropriate disposal arrangement and remove it from the hallway. It may require a booking, a collection point, or another locally approved method, depending on where you live. You handle the actual requirements, and the chair disappears. For a moment, you are tempted to feel ridiculous about the amount of effort involved. Then you remember something worth keeping: being an adult has never meant knowing every rule in advance. It means being capable of finding your way through the rules that matter. Even when the opposition is furniture.

Chapter 2 - Your Old Life Has an Excellent Public Relations Department

Your former hometown has become remarkably efficient since you moved away. At least, that is how you remember it. Public transport always seemed understandable. Shopping was easy. People knew your name. Friends were available at convenient moments, and the entire population apparently possessed the extraordinary ability to communicate without misunderstandings. Then you visit for a few days and discover that the buses are still occasionally late, your favourite café has become expensive, and a friend cancels dinner because of work. Nothing particularly dramatic has happened. Your memory has simply been advertising a luxury version of ordinary life, complete with carefully selected highlights and an impressive absence of inconveniences. The marketing department responsible for your past deserves a substantial bonus.

This becomes a problem when you use that polished version of the past to evaluate your present. You compare established friendships with people you met three weeks ago. You compare familiar streets with a neighbourhood you are still learning to navigate. You remember feeling confident at work, then judge yourself harshly for hesitating during a meeting in a different professional environment. Each comparison seems reasonable because it involves genuine experiences. Yet the conditions are rarely equivalent. Your previous life had years to develop its routines, relationships, and familiar comforts. Your current life may still be in its earliest stages. Measuring one against the other without considering that difference is like comparing a newly opened

restaurant with your favourite place after ten years of successful visits and expecting identical emotional attachment before the starters arrive.

Nostalgia itself is not an enemy. Remembering familiar places, important relationships, and enjoyable experiences can provide comfort. Sometimes those memories remind you of needs that still matter, such as friendship, independence, family connection, or opportunities for meaningful work. The difficulty begins when remembering becomes continuous evaluation. You stop enjoying a pleasant afternoon because it does not resemble the afternoons you once loved. A perfectly acceptable neighbourhood becomes disappointing because it lacks a particular atmosphere. Even good experiences struggle to receive recognition because they are immediately compared with something that has already acquired personal significance through years of repetition.

Compare ordinary days with ordinary days

One useful way to expose an unfair comparison is to reconstruct an ordinary day from your previous life. Choose a weekday without a holiday, major celebration, or particularly memorable event. What actually happened? You probably worked, travelled somewhere, completed routine responsibilities, and experienced some minor irritation. Perhaps you had an enjoyable conversation or a quiet evening. Perhaps you were too tired to do anything interesting. The day was neither wonderful nor disastrous. It was simply part of a familiar routine, surrounded by enough practical knowledge that most activities required little conscious effort.

Now consider a similarly ordinary day in your new country. You may spend extra time understanding transport

information, arranging an unfamiliar service, or communicating in a language that requires concentration. These difficulties are real. But the comparison becomes more accurate when you remember that your former routine also included responsibilities, disappointments, and occasional boredom. The difference is partly the amount of effort required to navigate them. You are comparing environments at different stages of familiarity, not necessarily discovering that one country possesses a supernatural talent for producing happiness.

There are also genuine differences that deserve attention. Your old city may have offered better access to family, more suitable work opportunities, or affordable services that are difficult to replace. Your new country might provide advantages in other areas. A fair comparison should allow both observations without forcing them into a single verdict. If something important has become worse, acknowledge it and consider whether any practical change is possible. If something has improved, let that improvement count. The goal is not to persuade yourself that moving abroad was unquestionably brilliant. It is to stop evaluating a complicated life through comparisons designed, perhaps unintentionally, to produce disappointment.

Social relationships illustrate the problem particularly well. Before moving, you might have belonged to a group of friends who understood one another's humour, personal histories, and unspoken preferences. Spending an evening together required little explanation. Now you meet pleasant people who know almost nothing about you, and conversations sometimes feel repetitive or superficial. You conclude that relationships in the new country lack depth. But closeness is not something a geographical location