

MAIDEN VOYAGE

EXPATS



Meet the expat ambassadors who are an integral part of the success of *maiden-voyage.com*, an internet networking site through which business women can meet up with like-minded women to make the most of their leisure time while traveling.

BY CAROLYN PEARSON



It was on a lonely business trip to Los Angeles that I came up with the idea of launching a community for female business travelers. I'd taken the weekend prior to my meetings to do some shopping and soak up the vibe of the city, enjoying my own company. Daytimes were great, but when it came to the evening, I found myself at a loose end. Staying in a business district, my options were limited to ordering room service or dining in the hotel restaurant alone, and I didn't feel comfortable venturing out by myself, particularly on a Saturday night. It was a wasted opportunity not to explore the bright lights of Hollywood and see the city at its best.

I launched *maiden-voyage.com* as soon as I got back to England. Due to some good coverage by *The New York Times* and CNN, I soon had members in over 60 countries. Many of these members were confident travelers but were excited about the prospect of connecting up with like-minded professional women. Others felt slightly more intimidated about heading to a new city alone, and I was often asked for travel tips and advice about all kinds of destinations, many of which I hadn't personally visited. I knew that there was something else that I could offer my members and I decided to build a team of global ambassadors. Today we have around 30 ambassadors from Sydney to Abu Dhabi to Shanghai to Toronto. The role of the ambassador is both exciting and varied. All ambassadors are professional women and well-traveled, and each writes her own city guide, in her own words, for an audience of women travelers. Ambassadors often make time to meet with our members, for a cup of coffee or glass of wine, to help get them oriented in their city and they can answer specific questions by email.

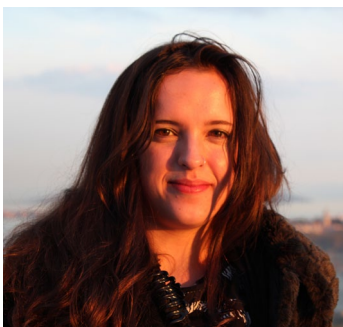
Expats are integral to the success of *maiden-voyage.com* because they see the city through the eyes of a traveler rather than taking everything for granted. Transport systems, safety considerations and customs will seem perfectly normal to a native but could be peculiar when experienced for the first time. Here, three of our expat ambassadors tell us why they relocated, and they share their observations of their maiden-voyage.com cities. ►

MEET THE EXPATS

SOPHIE HICKS

English native, living in Istanbul

I relocated to Istanbul in January 2014 to work as an English teacher for the British Council. Recently named the world's top holiday destination, Istanbul is a vibrant fusion of east and west – the only city to span two continents, and home to some of the most delicious cuisine (I particularly recommend the pistachio baklava). I am continuously discovering new aspects of the city: colorful Ottoman mansions in varying states of disrepair, abandoned forts, intricately-patterned mosques, hip new cafes serving gourmet coffee, traditional restaurants serving mezzes and Turkish tea. Istanbul has it all! I am originally from a small village on the Isles of Scilly, a group of islands off the coast of Cornwall. So one of the aspects I enjoy most about Istanbul is the buzz of its cultural diversity. People from all over the world call the city their home, and they form a welcoming community with an active social life that incorporates everything from parties on rooftop bars to belly dancing clubs. Furthermore, Istanbul is generally a very safe city. While I recommend taking the normal safety precautions if you visit – use your common sense and look out for suspicious behavior, as you would in any western city – it is a peaceful city, and the local Istanbulites are friendly and accommodating.



Karin Richman

English native, living in Vienna

My mother grew up in Vienna, but moved to the U.K. in 1957. She always encouraged me to learn German, but it wasn't until I studied the language and literature at university and spent a year in Germany with a family that I became bi-lingual. I always felt at home in German-speaking environments. In the mid-90s when the company I was working for in the UK reorganized, it meant a move for me. My partner at the time, now my husband, was already learning German and so we decided to relocate to Germany. His employment opportunities in Cologne, where my job initially took us, were limited, and my boss at the time knew about my mother's origins and offered me a promotion to move here.



Vienna is a very multi-cultural city. Originally the center of a much larger realm, Vienna can compete with much bigger cities in terms of the culture, architecture, concerts and museums. Since the Viennese behave as if they are still in a world of the Imperial Court, and discretion and personal privacy are held in high esteem, this can sometimes lead to an impression of standoffishness. However, modern society in Austria has enabled a good deal of equality and opportunity, and the circles in business

and politics are not as exclusive as in other countries. Greeting is an important ritual, and neglecting to greet is considered rude. Instead of a handshake with a woman, some Viennese men still pull her hand in the direction of their chin and say, "Kuss die Hand" (kiss the hand). It is still considered to be the height of good manners and should be tolerated discreetly. While privacy is respected, intimate space is often ignored. If you are alone on a bus or tram, do not be surprised if someone comes and sits or stands immediately next to you.

ANA ELISA SEIXAS

Portuguese native, living in Dubai

I first visited Dubai in 2004 on a stopover to Sri Lanka and immediately fell in love with the place. Everything was so different from Portugal – the place, the people, the food ... the temperature! At the time I was heavily involved with AIESEC, an international students association that promotes internships as a way to develop individuals and promote cultural differences awareness. So when the opportunity came to apply for an AIESEC traineeship working for DHL in Dubai, I jumped at it. In less than a month I went through the interview process, the visa process, packed my bags and arrived in Dubai shy of my 24th birthday. I was so excited to move to such a different place.



There are so many things I love about Dubai, especially being such a melting pot of cultures. I have friends from all around the world, and I have learned so much about cultural differences and tolerance and respect for other people and religions.

Another great thing about Dubai is the food. Since you have so many nationalities living in one place, you get to experience different cuisines. You can find Lebanese, Indian, Ethiopian, Thai and Korean restaurants, to name but a few; the difficulty is in the choosing.

It is amazing to be part of such a fast-growing city, especially if you like architecture. I have witnessed the Burj Khalifa construction from ground zero to 163th floor and seen so many amazing buildings spring up throughout the years; it's truly fascinating. It is especially striking if you compare it with Europe, where you don't have so many skyscrapers. Here everything seems to be new and shiny.

A GROWING TEAM

Our global ambassador team is continually expanding and we find great women from all kinds of different sources – enthusiastic members, referrals ... they find us. It's exciting to see where the next woman will come from with her own unique set of skills and experiences. The members are really starting to appreciate this valuable source of information and to know that they have a friend in the city they are traveling to. The ambassadors themselves have created their own community and friendships within the team, which is wonderful to watch. ■