

## School's out for summer

**Moving around the world can be stressful for everyone concerned, but for teenagers worried about school and friends it can be quite an upheaval. This week Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich sets out an action plan for a reader worried about preparing her teenage daughter for school and life in Germany.**

---

*Marion wrote:*

*We are moving to Germany this August (by the looks of it just for one year). My teenage daughter does not speak German. We have explored the international schools as she did not want to lose a year of high school, however she also truly wants to learn German. We fear that the German language skills taught at international school are marginal and she will subsequently remain in the expat bubble. Are there alternatives, what to consider, any insights?*

---

Dear Marion,

I could just see the aspirations and opportunities connected to this move! To truly benefit from this chance to experience another culture, learn another language is something most parents wish for their children. But just a word of caution: we need to look at the capacities and coping skills of a teenager here.

As long as we enjoy the “armchair comfort of home” a year abroad looks like a wonderful adventure. The jubilant feeling of this “extended holiday” comes to an end when everyday responsibilities present themselves and we are haunted by some decisions made based on unrealistic expectations.

There will be enough changes and challenges for your daughter, even before you set foot on German soil, there is the teenage trauma of saying goodbye to friends, and the concern of acceptance by the other kids at the new school.

Do ask the international school if they offer a summer programme for newcomers to catch up on subjects as needed. This also presents a chance to get to know other pupils before the official school start.

International schools have a lot of experience with newcomers, most pupils will settle in the new routine. Only after the passing of acclimatisation phase, has the time come to set realistic goals and aims, like taking extra courses in the German Language Lab.

Let's be careful not to push the sole academic learning of a language, the learning by doing approach can work miracles say by joining a local sport club or interest group.

This encourages the building of “out of the bubble” friendships and will provide a great way to tap into the resources of the cultural informer. The personal relationships become the true added value of what you may have in mind for your daughter. If you have a relocation company they can help you with some initial contacts.

The smart mover plans ahead, in this case, you need to include looking at the repatriation. The “not wanting to miss a year from school”, means more than just the academics it may also refer to not wanting to be separated from her peer group.

Consider asking her present best friend to come and visit during one of the holiday and get your daughter to plan the visit and prepare a programme — this will put her in the role of the local specialist and supports the “bonding” with the host culture.

Most often we see expats arrive and say: “I want to emerge, I want to truly learn the local lingo, wear a T-shirt that says I am not a tourist.” These are the right attitudes. However, like any big venture, this needs to be managed in terms of priorities and energy.

Consider this as training for a marathon, so do not focus on the 100 yards. Or to finish with a Persian proverb: step by step one should ascend the stairs.

I look forward to your questions.

---

*Hilly van Swol-Ulbrich is managing partner of CONSULTus. Her website is [WWW.Consultus.net](http://WWW.Consultus.net). She reserves the right to decide which questions she considers relevant for her column. She will, however, not answer any questions dealing with tax or legal matters.*