

This Company Helps Americans Navigate the Journey to Becoming Expats

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When Jen Barnett was a grad student in her 20s, she was overwhelmed with her studies and looking for a way out. “I walked out of class, dropped out and tried to buy a one-way ticket to France,” she explains. While her travel agent talked her off the ledge and convinced her to make it a round-trip ticket instead, the seed was planted for Barnett’s life as an expat and her business, [Expatsi](#).

Barnett met her husband Brett Andrews in 2015, and the conversation around moving abroad came up shortly after that when the 2016 political turmoil began in the U.S. With thoughts of moving to Vancouver, Canada, they took a trip there, only to find that while it was a great city to visit, Vancouver wasn’t somewhere they could see themselves living long term. As they researched more, they also learned that [it wasn’t necessarily easy](#) for Americans to move to Canada.

They put this decision on hold until 2020, when they were both working remotely, and the political pressure came up again. Barnett recalls thinking, “Why don’t we go sit at home someplace better, less expensive, and a place we like more and maybe that isn’t so contentious as it is here at home?”

So Barnett and Andrews decided to double down on their research. They started a list with every country in the world and gathered data about weather, culture, distance from their family and friends in Alabama and more, and compared notes with each other. This helped them whittle down their list to 10 potential countries that had what they were looking for and offered visas they could apply for.

The idea was that they would visit each country over 10 years, finally deciding on where they would make a permanent move. They first visited Mérida, Mexico, based on some TikTok videos, and loved it. They decided to forgo their 10-year plan and just move to Mérida with the idea that they could [keep working remotely](#) for their current jobs. However, that plan quickly changed when their jobs altered their remote working criteria.

The start of Expatsi

When Barnett’s job changed the criteria for working remotely, she thought, “What if we take all that data that we put together and we built it into a product? We can’t be the only ones having these feelings, because we already know that our friends are having these feelings, too. What if we turn it into something?”

Barnett and Andrews created the Expatsi website to help guide people looking to leave the U.S. Barnett had a background in marketing, and Andrews learned to code during the pandemic. They used those skills to get the business off the ground. They started by sharing it with friends and family, but in June 2022, Barnett decided to run some website ads. Five days later, *Roe v. Wade* was overturned, and the site saw a huge influx of visitors.

The Expatsi test

Visitors to the Expatsi website start by taking a 20-question test that helps narrow down what countries would be a good fit for them. Questions include what kind of visa you’d apply for, the distance from the U.S., your preferred climates and how you plan to pay for health care. You can also indicate whether you want to live in a country where things like same-sex marriage, recreational cannabis and abortion are legal.

Once you’ve completed the test, you’ll find out the 10 countries you’ve most closely matched with and a blurb about each. Click on any of the countries to be directed to web pages with additional information like cost of living, how the country ranks for raising kids and retiring, and health care stats.

Services offered by Expatsi

Barnett and Andrews quickly learned that potential expats sought more than just data and statistics when considering potential countries. They started a Facebook group for the community they were building and regularly went live on TikTok to answer questions.

Group scouting trips

Group scouting trips were a big request from the Expatsi community. Barnett and Andrews hosted their first scouting trip in March 2024 to Spain and Portugal. “The idea behind the scouting trips is that you can go on vacation to a place, but that’s very first-date, honeymoon-type behavior,” Barnett explains. “It’s not what it’s really like to be married to a place.”

On these scouting trips, travelers stay in an Airbnb instead of a hotel to get a feel for a neighborhood and what it’s like to buy groceries and cook meals there. Barnett has one rule: “No churches, no museums, no landmarks.” You will pass by these places as you explore the city but won’t be touring them. Instead, you’ll go to the market and the pharmacy and ride public transit.

Expatsi holds a seminar on the first night where a tax accountant, attorney, health insurance professional and realtor give short presentations. The group enjoys a meal together, during which the visitors can ask the experts questions pertinent to their individual circumstances. Stephanie Stone-Robb attended this scouting trip and found the experience very helpful. “They did an amazing job of preplanning and giving us guidance in the months leading up to the trip. It was nice to have the seminars in the two countries we traveled to.”

The future of Expatsi

On the night of the 2024 Biden/Trump debate, the Expatsi site saw an 800% increase in traffic of people wanting to explore expat life. Barnett and Andrews seized this opportunity and quickly pivoted to add ways to consult with people who didn’t have the time for overseas visits. They started offering webinar versions of the seminars typically offered on the first night of their scouting tours. They’ve recently done one on Greece’s Golden Visa and have plans for upcoming seminars on expat life in Spain and Italy.

As they accumulate more and more expat contacts in other countries, Barnett and Andrews plan to connect those expat contacts with potential expats to create a web of knowledge. “I can’t be an expert in everything,” Barnett explains. “What I want is for us to have a platform where local expats can offer anything they want to you that you might need... We don’t have that passed-down knowledge of how to immigrate like people in other countries do, because Americans in the past have not immigrated.”

Photo courtesy Expatsi



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Kate Loweth is a writer and editor based in the San Francisco Bay Area with over a decade of experience covering travel, parenting, business and culture. Her work has appeared in outlets including USA Today, Business Insider, AARP, AAA and Thrillist. Kate is happiest when she's traveling with her three teenagers and exploring a new city or national park.

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