

THE REAL 'EMILY IN PARIS'

BY **EMILY SCRIVENER**

You may have heard of the (in)famous 'Emily in Paris' Netflix series. An American lady, Emily, relocates to Paris to join a marketing firm, but initially faces unwelcoming locals, love triangles and other challenging stereotypes. Before I lose the French readership within this first paragraph, I should say my 'Emily in Paris' experience has been rather different!

There are some parallels between Emily and I, notably our names and new country of residence. Beyond these though, the similarities fade away.

My move was pre-meditated, rather than having the stars align. I had been in London for most of my working life and adore the city. I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunities I was given there, socially and professionally. The hustle and bustle and strong insurance history make London a fantastic hub for actuaries.

This made it a very difficult decision to make, whether to leave London indefinitely. I built my career in London, the largest insurance hub in >

'The hustle and bustle and strong insurance history make London a fantastic hub for actuaries.'



EMILY SCRIVENER is head of Pricing at AXA XL, Paris.

Europe. Would I be afforded the same opportunities in France? I still have so much energy and ambition; would this move mean a plateau to my career?

But the time had come to move, driven by several personal factors. Therefore, I began to set the cogs in motion, beginning with my employer. I love my job, team, and AXA XL. I really wanted this move to benefit us both. So, I started the conversation early, initially with my manager and then with HR.

‘Understanding the basics of social security, tax and retirement planning in the country should not be forgotten, nor underestimated.’

I found myself in the very fortunate position that AXA XL was flexible to accommodate the move. This was made possible thanks to their passion to develop their employees. Indeed, employees have access to roles within AXA XL, globally, but also in all other AXA entities, with intra entity and intra company moves surprisingly common. As AXA XL has an entity in Paris with Pricing Actuaries, a local contract was created. There are other ways to do this, but a local contract was the right solution for me. Step one, tick!

The next step was the visa process... not as straight forward as I hoped! The key here is to gather all the relevant paperwork, to the required standards. For example, the UK often accepts original documents, whereas in France, they usually require a recent copy, which incurred costs and took time to retrieve from the UK government. But my application was accepted. Step two, tick!

I could then book a one-way ticket to Paris! However, once arriving in Paris, the to-do list continued.

Understanding the basics of social security, tax and retirement planning in the country should not be forgotten, nor underestimated. For example, what is their healthcare system, do you require insurance, can you transfer retirement funds to your new country of residence, >



are self-assessment tax returns required? This is an area I have particularly struggled with in France, despite receiving advice prior to the move. Their system is very different to what I am used to, therefore, feels very complex. I'm slowly understanding a bit more every time I use the healthcare system for example, but it hasn't been easy.

'There are other ways to do this, but a local contract was the right solution for me.'

Next, finding somewhere to live! I chose to look for privately rented accommodation but lacked the necessary paperwork. Landlords lacked flexibility when requesting my documentation (usually three months recent French payslips, latest French tax return, proof of previous rental payments). My company provided an employment contract and a letter including my tenure from the UK, but this often was not enough to appease the landlords. This is probably a reflection of the rental market in Paris at the time and made life difficult. However, one landlord accepted me, on the condition I have a guarantor. Fortunately, I had someone in France who could do this for me, but this may not be the case for everybody. There may be room to negotiate though, for example using rent insurance. It depends



on the country you're in and its laws, and the rental market.

Perhaps the most significant part of any move to a new country is the personal and social life. This is a big life event and can feel lonely, especially if you move alone. What I found most useful was leveraging my current network. There exists the idea 'six degrees of separation'. This suggests you are only six or fewer people away from knowing any other person. I have therefore made lots of friends of friends!

I have also met many successful and dynamic actuaries and had many interesting opportunities come my way, including presenting at a conference (in French!) and writing this article. This has contributed to realising that my trepidations about a career in Paris as an actuary were unfounded. I have found the actuarial industry in Paris welcoming and dynamic. Of course, I cannot comment about

the marketing industry, but I can say my integration has been simpler than Emily's!

So, whilst there might be a little less glamour, and a little less drama, this Emily in Paris is making the most of her life in the City of Lights.

'This is probably a reflection of the rental market in Paris at the time and made life difficult.'

I should mention this article contains my own opinions and not those of AXA XL, and ought not be considered advice. I muddled through my move with lots and lots of help. I recommend you consider your individual circumstances and do the relevant research if you are considering moving country. <