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## Get Ahead By Venturing Overseas

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By Mok Fei Fei

Venturing abroad for a holiday is almost everyone's idea of fun.

But how about heading overseas for an extended spell?

That may seem a little scary, even ill-advised to some.

But experts say foreign working experience is likely to enrich your professional life and make you a more valuable asset to your employer.

Human resource consultants point out that candidates who are able to list credible overseas work experience on their resumes often get a head start. One human resource consultant told The Straits Times: "Firms are aware that such candidates are more adaptable to a new work environment, likely to communicate effectively and possess more exposure to varied business cultures."

OCBC chief executive Samuel Tsien concurred when he spoke recently at a leadership dialogue organised by the National University of Singapore Business School. He noted that, globally, companies are no longer confined to just a single location, as many are expanding operations worldwide.

"In the business world, people move to where the opportunities are and, therefore, borders are no longer a constraint," he said.

This is especially true for local companies facing a small domestic market. Many look beyond Singapore's borders to find new markets and revenue opportunities. Citing an IE Singapore Internationalisation Survey conducted last year, Mr Tsien said 67 per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises here aim to increase the number of new overseas markets. And these companies, he said, would want to deploy their home country staff to the new markets to ensure that their corporate cultures and best practices are passed on to the staff there. Practising what he advocates, Mr Tsien said he had moved from Hong Kong to San Francisco, London and now Singapore.

Getting staff to relocate is not always easy. Many Singaporeans are apparently quite reluctant when it comes to an overseas posting though plenty do it anyway. About 200,000 Singaporeans were living, working or studying overseas last year - an increase of just 43,000 over the past decade. If the demographics are limited to those in the 30 to 49 age group - the ones most likely to be in a company's middle or senior management - the number drops to 70,000, including dependants.

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**Kerry Consulting general manager Pan Zaixian told The Straits Times that employees with school-going children tend to be worried about their education and are more reluctant to relocate.**

Common reservations expressed by people here wary of a foreign posting include the fear of not having a job to return to back home, family considerations and relocation anxiety. Women may also be less open to going to places seen as unsafe.

**"Singaporeans generally tend to prefer their creature comforts and shun the more emerging markets or where language is a big barrier," he added.**

Risks exist but perks await those who take the plunge.

Employees willing to go overseas can often get attractive expatriate pay packages that would include significant accommodation and transportation allowances. This brings with it new problems when overseas Singaporeans decide to move back home.

**"The pay expectation of the returnees can sometimes be quite inflated, especially when they are on expatriate terms overseas," Mr Pan said.**

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