



Relocation, relocation, relocation



Helen Mills

Dubai has seen a huge focus over the passed few years on its residential property market but now, with the anticipated completion of so many commercial buildings, we must ask ourselves who will occupy these units and what problems will arise from an influx of new companies and their staff. There is now global recognition that Dubai has the capability, not just as a holiday resort but also as a very cosmopolitan and forward thinking city for worldwide companies looking to relocate to the Middle East.

So, are all expats prepared for their new life in Dubai? Past experience shows that a majority of people moving here are unaware of issues that face them and are confronted with many confusing and time consuming obstacles; however with the fast pace of growth, even existing residents of Dubai can get frustrated with the ever changing rules and regulations, all of which are being implemented by the government here to make life much smoother, but still it is sometimes hard to keep up.

Property investors all over the world have been watching Dubai with eager anticipation and bulging bank balances, but what if you are actually coming to live here with your family, are you really concerned about square footage prices on the latest iconic building? I would say no, what you really want to know is how much a three bedroom villa will cost to rent, where are all the schools located, hospitals, dentists, banks etc.. Research before moving here can indeed make the path much easier but where do you start? There are many expat web pages that you can easily spend hours looking through from the comfort of your home, but just one example is house rents, which are altering on a weekly basis and very few of these sites can actually keep up with the changes. Schools are of course another issue, the extent of growth here has moved much faster than the completion of many of the proposed new schools.

Dubai is now associated with many big company names moving here and offering fantastic lifestyles in a tax free haven but are they actually addressing all the day to day issues of being a resident here or indeed do they have the time and human resources to assist new employees. I feel that these problems need to be dealt with sooner rather than later; already there is talk of a shortfall in

the workforce that is needed here to continue with the amazing progress.

Some 292,000 people have become Dubai residents in just one year as the emirate's population increased to 1.422 million in 2006, from 1.130 million in 2005; this does not include tourists. These kinds of figures are indicative of the phenomenal growth in Dubai. Whilst this is all very exciting, it is with a certain amount of trepidation that I look to the future. All families that are relocated to Dubai with their employees must be better prepared for what faces them. In my experience as a relocation agent, I have dealt with several companies who have lost key members of staff simply because the most basic problems for families were not dealt with.

It is a daunting task, especially for those with young children, to have to deal with finding a home within your budget, finding a school which has places and all this on top of leaving family and friends and starting a new job. Standards and practices of letting agents across Dubai vary hugely, but how do you assess them? An obvious choice would be recommendation of course, but even then, the whole procedure of letting a house here is so very different from many other countries. To begin with rents are paid in advance, usually for the whole term of the contract. Not all agents will assist you with utilities, so how are you supposed to know what paperwork is needed for DEWA, how are you supposed to know who DEWA (Dubai Electricity & Water Authority) are? When it comes to dealing with schooling, many schools have very informative web sites but many have very long waiting lists. Would you ever consider changing your children's curriculum? From my very own experience I was mortified to think of changing from the British one, however I had no choice and so sent my children to a school which follows an international diploma; this happily resulted in a very

positive experience for me.

From a companies point of view I am sure that offering an attractive salary with all the usual expat benefits would deem to be enough to bring the workforce that it needs to take advantage of the huge opportunities here. I would argue that many companies need to revise their process, economic investment is not enough. Dubai is a benchmark for the Middle East so we need to get things right. As the relocations manager at Dubai Luxury Homes, I am witnessing a shift in attitudes of people arriving; they want more from their employers when it comes to moving here. I recently had a conversation with a senior member of staff at a multinational company based here in Dubai, he had worked out that, on average, they lost about three weeks in working hours from new employees while dealing with these issues, not to mention the stress that it causes for them and their families. It is all well and good investing in property here in Dubai, but I think it is high time companies started investing in its people.



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