

Cheryl and the girls have had their fair share of rollercoaster rides too, with trips to the competent local hospitals for a broken arm and a broken foot for Cheryl, and seven stitches in a nasty gash to the eldest's chin sustained during her school music recital (I ask you! How do kids manage it?). Still, we are really feeling settled now and the high points more than make up for it. Great friends, a thriving expat community, a good school, some great golf for me, a nice house in a safe environment and some world class hotels to remind us just how lucky we are all combine to mean as a family we are thoroughly enjoying our Bangalore experience.

All too suddenly my concentration was rudely dragged back the sight of a large truck barrelling down my side of the road as he overtook a local bus around a blind bend.

One glance at the combined mass of over 20 tonnes of diesel belching steel, effectively occupying all available tarmac, meant I suddenly had a graphic illustration of the one immutable truth of the otherwise fairly arbitrary Indian traffic rules. Namely, 'Might is Right'!

With only a moment's hesitation I dived off the road and heart pounding brought the bike to a wobbly stop on the muddy verge and immediately conked the engine out! 'Well that was smoothly done' I thought, as I was simultaneously descended upon by a crowd of scruffy young boys asking all manner of questions. 'Who was I? What was my name? Why had I stopped? Did I need help? Could I give them a pencil? Could they have a ride on my bike?' I just stared blankly at the sea of smiling faces as I tried vainly to kick

start the bike. (I still haven't really mastered the trick of manually starting this marvel of Indian engineering)

The next hour passed in a magical combination of colourful Indian chaos, which can only really be experienced in person as most of it defies description. From the elegant Indian women perched primly in their immaculate colourful saris on the back of mopeds - some complete with rest of the family and personal belongings - to the sacred cows which wander the open roads, to the smells, sights, sounds and colours of the local markets.

All of a sudden the spell was broken as finally I reached the safety and tranquillity of our Palm Meadows gated community. I had done it! I had stared into the eyes of the beast that was the open Indian highway and emerged unscathed. I felt both relieved and exhilarated that I had survived and at the same time disappointed, as I knew it would be another whole week before I could do it again. Why? Well of course I had really only passed stage one of the Indian Traffic experience, at eight on Sunday morning. Deep down I knew it might be at least another year before I took on the real test. The evening rush hour drive back into town, which my driver does on a daily basis. My already high respect for his driving skills had just gone up considerably!

# SPOUSE WORK PERMITS

KATHLEEN VAN DER WILK-CARLTON AND  
FRANCOISE VAN ROOSMALEN, PERMITS FOUNDATION

“Will I be able to work?” is one of the first questions many partners ask when a new posting arises. Often the answer is not a simple “yes” or “no” and the situation in India is a bit like that too. It depends on several factors including personal motivation, skills and experience, networking and competition for jobs in an unfamiliar location. Most importantly, a work permit is necessary.

In India, spouses are not permitted to work on a dependant’s ‘X’ visa. If they get a job offer, they need to return to their home country or another country to apply for an employment ‘E’ visa. This can be expensive and inconvenient and it may even deter employers from offering a job. Unmarried partners are not recognised and their option is limited to a tourist visa for 6 months or finding a job and applying independently for an employment visa.

Spouses have mixed experiences with getting an employment visa in India. Catherine Nickerson, whose skills as a university professor were in high demand, found the process straightforward. (See success story on page 26). According to Strategic Links India, a not-for-profit membership association that advises spouses on job search, demand for qualified personnel is growing and there is a shortage of specialists and middle management in the healthcare, IT, telecom, hospitality and retail sectors. They find that the difficulty of getting an employment visa is the most important limiting factor for a spouse who wants to work.



## PROMOTING CHANGE IN INDIA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

Permits Foundation is a global initiative of international employers who would like to see this situation improved not only in India, but also worldwide. Set up in 2001, the foundation advocates work authorisation for spouses and partners of international staff. Shell is a founder sponsor. The foundation has successfully promoted change in the Netherlands, France, the USA and Hong Kong and has made proposals to the European Commission for incorporation in Europe-wide legislation. This year, the foundation is focussing on India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and Russia.

Permits argues that allowing expatriate spouses and partners to work helps to attract highly skilled employees who make a positive contribution to the economy and also creates an attractive climate for investment. This small, but important concession represents a "triple win" for host countries, employers and families.

Fortunately, governments are responding positively. Nearly 20 countries now allow spouses or, in some cases partners, to work and the list is growing. The UK, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are among the best

practice countries (see diagram page 27). They allow spouses, partners and children to work freely without any further bureaucracy.

India is an important destination for international businesses, diplomatic missions and NGOs. The foundation's staff recently visited New Delhi where Shell hosted a meeting with employers and spouses to gauge support for improving work permit processes. Delegates were unanimous in recognising the growing importance of dual careers and partner employment aspirations in attracting highly skilled staff to an international career. They agreed that it would be worthwhile to promote change in legislation and that there might also be scope to network further on job opportunities.

In a keynote address, Vikram Mehta, Country Chairman of Shell India Private Limited, underlined the importance of working together. "Permits Foundation is an excellent global initiative and I fully support working together with other companies and diplomatic organisations to raise awareness of the issue with the authorities in India". Archana Bhaskar, Shell's HR director in Bangalore, agreed to chair a local steering group to help take the issue forward in India.



## FEEDBACK WANTED

Permits Foundation would like to hear from spouses and partners whose employment aspirations have been affected one way or another by work permit processes in any country. Both positive and negative experiences are valuable. Please email us at [permitsfoundation@shell.com](mailto:permitsfoundation@shell.com)

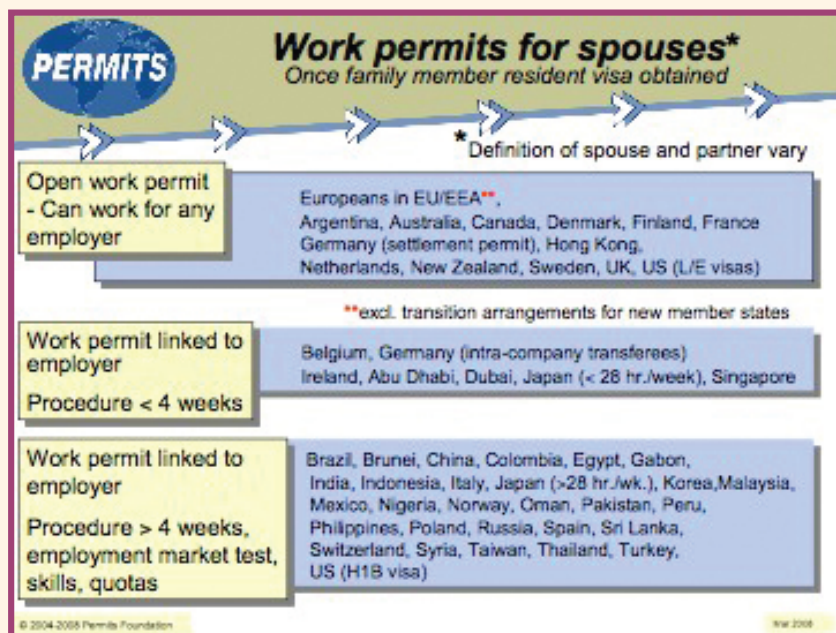
## SUCCESS STORY — ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT BUSINESS SCHOOL, BANGALORE

Catherine Nickerson, who is British, has a PhD in business communication and twenty years experience in teaching and research. Before going to India, she held a position for 13 years as an Associate Professor at the Radboud University Nijmegen in the Netherlands. When she learned of her husband's posting to Bangalore, she contacted a number of Indian professionals in her field who confirmed that there was a chronic shortage of teaching staff at tertiary level. She used net resources and business publications to identify the top business schools with MBA programmes, arranged for interviews to take place during a short visit prior to the move and obtained several job offers as an associate professor. Catherine returned to the Netherlands with a letter of appointment, applied to the Indian Consulate in The Hague and was granted an employment visa on the same day. It allowed her multiple entries for a year for employment purposes and was not connected to her husband's visa in any way. The Foreigners Registration Office in India required a financial guarantee covering repatriation in the event of the end of employment. Fortunately, Shell provided this as her own employer was not happy to make the commitment. Since arriving in India two years ago, Catherine has worked for two different organisations and converted her visa at India House in London with little difficulty, although she had to show proof of tax payments.

In July of this year she will taking up a position as a Visiting Professor in the Communication Unit at the Indian Institute of Management-Bangalore.

## GETTING AN EMPLOYMENT VISA IN INDIA

- An expatriate employee needs an 'E' visa, linked to an Indian employer who issues a letter of invitation. Consular officers can exercise discretion whether an applicant has relevant qualifications.
- Married spouses and children are granted dependant visas ('X' visas), with no entitlement to work. The law does not recognise unmarried or single sex partners. Unmarried partners may be granted a 'T' (tourist) visa, valid for 6 months.
- If a spouse wants to work, he or she must leave the country to apply for an 'E' visa in the home country or a third country.



Permits Foundation is supported by 50 international companies, diplomatic organisations and NGOs. Shell is one of the founder sponsors.



# NO REGRETS

## YATI CRANFIELD

Yati Cranfield is from Indonesia and her husband Landale Cranfield is from Scotland. They moved to Bangalore nearly two years ago, where Landale works in Shell Technology India ( STI ). The Cranfields moved to Bangalore from Abu Dhabi.

After months of worrying about where we might be moving to next, we had confirmation. "Bangalore...India...That doesn't sound so good!" said some of our friends. We went ahead anyway and haven't regretted the decision.

Our first impression of Bangalore, was our experience at the Bangalore International Airport. There were so many people, but no-one to pick us up. We had our flight information and nothing else. Not a clue about hotels, and no mobile telephone to call someone. Luckily one of the local taxi drivers lent us his phone and we called our Shell contact. A hotel was arranged and by 1.30am we opened the door to our room at the Taj West End Hotel.

It was two months later and a transit house in between, before we moved into what would become our home here – a brand new house in Epsilon Ventures at Yemlur road. It's a large house in a gated compound, with a big garden, so I can plant all the trees and flowers I like...at least until my husband tells me to stop because it's looking like a jungle!

Bangalore is not called the garden city of India without good reason. Homes and public spaces are very green relative to other cities in India. I have discovered many new and beautiful flowers and plants since being in Bangalore and it has been a highlight of living here.

My daughter Emily is very happy too. Around 90% of the children in the community study at the TISB (The International School Bangalore) which is about a 30 minute journey from our house. This means Emily has lots of friends to play with, and the fact that the community is enclosed makes it very safe, and also means there are lots of organized activities for her to join in with.

Bangalore has excellent weather, it's pleasantly hot all year round, and is quite good for shopping. A very famous place is Commercial street where one can buy cheap clothes such as beautiful silk Sari's, western style cotton clothes, local Indian handicrafts, material for house furnishings and much more. This is great fun especially since all prices are negotiable. There are always lots of tourists around and many places to 'visit' such as the local temples, Samudra waterfalls, the historic parliament and



court buildings, Cubbin Park, Nandi Hills and for the children Wonder La water park.

Our experience with the health care system has been very positive, the facilities are excellent. The Manipal Hospital, for example, which is close to our house, has an extremely high standard of clean accommodation for patients. This is mainly a result of the increasing trade in Medical Tourism since the services are cheap in India compared to Europe and the United States.

My husband is kept busy out of the office with children's rugby. About a year ago he set up the mini and youth rugby sections in Bangalore - there are now 175 children registered and we have a number of new groups starting up in local

schools. I'm kept busy with the rugby too. It's a big administration job, and I take the register every week and keep it up to date.

From a rather unsettling start, as Shell grows and more expats arrive, everything seems to fall into place more and more. We are happy living in Bangalore even though it can be difficult at times. Our brand new house has an unpredictable power supply and we get water leaks. But whenever the difficulties start getting to me, I just sit out on my balcony with a cup of coffee and look out over my garden at our many wonderful plants and flowers, and feel immediately relaxed. The bad times never last long.

# THE EXPAT MEME MACHINE

PHYLLIS BAUDOIN GRIFFARD

Have you ever noticed after arriving at a new posting how, without your permission, local mannerisms start to implant themselves, like weeds, in your interpersonal repertoire? This realisation hit me between the eyes while going through Immigration in the US recently. After a year in Japan I automatically initiated a bow to the puzzled agent who had stamped my passport and allowed me through. I caught myself on the way down and chuckled at yet another “meme” gaffe in my expat life.

What is a meme? Some memes are semi-conscious habits picked up in the host country, like taking shoes off at the door in Asia, or handling money with the right hand in Africa.

Others are the little nuances of rhythm or intonation that are unconsciously incorporated into speech patterns. Take the different ways gossiping women show disbelief and dismay. From the deep, prolonged, guttural “Ehhh?” in China to the pointed, high-pitched “Eh?!” in West Africa, women around the world have their own ways of saying, “you have got to be kidding!” It’s easier to notice as a newcomer because only then are you released from the need to actually understand a word that is said!

Like their more famous biological cousins the genes, memes spread through populations by replication and can mutate and evolve along the way. Memes can be large cultural constructs like