



Alex Cotoranu (27) stands out from the crowd

Photo: Alex Cotoranu

Born to be a global nomad

Alex Cotoranu shares his experience living in different countries

By Evgenia Belyaeva

When meeting a person for the first time you usually ask where he comes from. Most of us would not hesitate and give a straightforward answer: “I come from England” or “I am Kenyan”, but for Alex Cotoranu (27) it is a difficult question. He is puzzled every time someone asks him that. “It’s complex, but I have learnt to adjust my answer,” he says. “I am Canadian originally from Romania who studied in Sweden and now lives in Germany.” Other times he would say, “I am Romanian who grew up in Canada, studied in Sweden and currently working in Germany.” However, he is not a stereotypical Canadian and he does not associate himself that much with the Romanian culture or the people. “I am actually more worldly,” Cotoranu says laughingly. “I have adopted things from different countries including Romania, Canada, Italy, Sweden and now Germany.”

How the global nomad was made

It all began when Alex Cotoranu was only five years old. Growing up in a revolution-torn capital city of Romania Bucharest in the 1990s, his family left with little choice away from numerous street protests, violence and instability that marked the end of the Romanian communist regime of Nicolae Ceaușescu. The decision to move for the first time he says “is not always yours to take.”

Key moments from Cotoranu’s childhood in Romania are still engraved on his mind. “I remember coming out from my grandparents’ apartment during winter months in a stroller and wearing a new pair of winter woollen socks that my grandmother would knit for me every year. I will never forget saying goodbye to my grandparents,” he says with a nostalgic smile on his face. This marks the exact time that his love for travel and relocation really began.

Having relatives in Germany and wanting to guarantee a safer future for Alex Cotoranu, the family moved to Germany. Cotoranu attended a German kindergarten, picked up the German language really quickly and made new friends.

One day, Cotoranu learnt with a great surprise that the family had decided to move to Vancouver, Canada. "I did not know what to expect. I thought people would be really big and tall there and I would grow up a big Canadian guy," Cotoranu says laughingly. He began to attend a Canadian school with only 5 Canadian children; the rest came from all over the world. In Canada he learnt to understand

that it was different and a different Canada felt and yet it felt

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deliberately independent decision to move took place when his parents sold the house that they had in Canada and decided to move back to Germany where they had both found interesting job offers. Cotoranu's decision was motivated in equal measure by his wish to move close to his parents and his roots, and his own desire for change. He also wanted to be in a different environment for his studies. "Having been in Italy for two months with the ItaliaDesign field school, I felt that love for Europe was growing in me again. I decided to be in the moment, take the opportunity and do a Master's degree in Europe," says the young global nomad.

Two years after coming to Europe, Cotoranu was living in Copenhagen, Denmark and studying interaction design at the University of Malmö, just across the bridge in Sweden. University life began again, with the associated freedom of living alone, enjoying a big city, as well as, outdoors and biking culture in Scandinavia. "Sweden is a special place for me," Cotoranu smiles. It is a country where he met his Iranian wife Avissa Bigdelli, whom he met studying for the same Master's program in Interaction Design.

New job, new city

Together with his wife, Cotoranu moved back to Cologne where he found a traineeship in the Communications Department at the European Aviation Safety Agency. Cotoranu seems to enjoy his job to the fullest. "I love to solve problems of interaction between people. I am always looking for news ways of doing it. I love to be creative," he says.

Has Cotoranu's experience made him different in the work environment? Does his global nomadic character show? Filippo Sellara, an Italian colleague, who shares an office with the young multilingual, is convinced that the international experience has shaped Cotoranu's personality. "He has the ability to adapt easily to different situations, he is open-minded, creative and aware of different cultures," he says.

Where is home?

Most people have a traditional understanding and associations of home: family, childhood and your country. For Alex Cotoranu it is also a difficult question to answer. "People are the most important factor for me. If my wife is with me, it is home, if my parents and closest friends are with me, it is home," he says. However, he misses many places from his nomadic life. "You spend some time in a place and it becomes home. Places like Florence, the Alps or Corsica could be home for me. Places that let you experience life and be social and happy can make me feel home," says Cotoranu.

What the future holds

Alex's rationale for moving evolved over time. As a child, he had to move with his parents. When he was 20, he went on a University field school to Italy. Later he was on a trip in the UK visiting his friends and by coincidence applied to study at the University of Malmö and simply remained there for two years. He moved back to Germany because he found an interesting job.

The surest thing on Cotoranu's mind now is that he might move again. Although he is inclined to move back to Canada within the next decade, he is willing to let fate have a hand in it. "Anything is possible, you always plan one thing but you end up doing something different," he says.

As a nomad, the urge to move towards the next horizon is very strong. As Cotoranu puts it, "Once you have the taste of it, you want to have more."

How many students study abroad?

Many global nomads began their experience by studying abroad and then decide to remain in a foreign country to pursue their careers. According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics the number of international students has risen dramatically from 0.6 million worldwide in 1975 to more than three million in 2009. The number of international students is estimated to grow to eight million in 2025.

International student flows impact different countries in different ways. Some countries are the usual host destinations, while others see international students rarely, often only as a part of their studies. The United States remains the biggest destination for international students, followed by the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia and New Zealand. The largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea, followed by the students from the European Union. Asian students represent 52 % of foreign students enrolled worldwide. However, since 2000 the fastest growing regions of destinations for international students are Latin America, Caribbean and Asia.

Further information:

<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/>

<http://www.oecd.org/education/>

<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/>