



## How to tackle loneliness living as a single expat

Loneliness. It's the most obvious and yet least talked about challenge you will face as a single expat worker. For some, it is can be seen as a weakness to admit that you are struggling with being alone when living as a single expat. Yet, if left unchecked, it can have serious ramifications on both your mental and physical health. Being

lonely isn't just unpleasant, it's also unhealthy.

To some degree, feeling lonely and isolated is a natural part of living overseas alone, but it needn't get to the point where it forces you to move back home. Here are some things you can do living as a single expat to help alleviate loneliness.



# 1. Take the time you need to settle in

We are social creatures that for the most part thrive when part of a group or community, and living overseas is no exception. But don't panic if this doesn't happen all at once.

For a start, you are not the only one experiencing this. Most people living as a single expat can take time to find new friends and often it can be several months before you develop any meaningful relationships. Being alone for a while is natural – you are in a new country and all those

social networks you have spent years or even decades cultivating have disappeared overnight. So try not to worry if it takes more time than you expected to build your social community.

At the same time however, be careful not to accept this as part of single expat life, because it isn't. With a little effort on your part, there will be many opportunities out there for you to once again start building a reliable circle of friends.

# 2.

## Be proactive

The simple truth is that you're not going to make friends by staying at home. You need to find ways to put yourself in social situations where you can connect with other people.

This doesn't necessarily have to mean spending your nights in bars and clubs, which, while fun, can also be noisy and chaotic, and not always the best way to meet new people. There are plenty of other ways to find new friendships. Look for meet-up groups around your hobbies and interests. You'll find that popular expat destinations have all the bases covered – from food to sport to arts, languages and much more.

You may even think about using this as an opportunity to nurture new interests and experiences, which after all was likely part of the reason you moved overseas in the first place. Similarly, don't limit yourself just to people from your home country – there are plenty of new people out there for you to meet. All it takes is for you to be proactive and take that first step.





## 3.

## Tap into work colleagues



We all want a life outside of work, but for many single expats the office is an important and useful source for making friends. For a start, you will most likely find other expats that are either in the same position that you are in, or who have experienced something similar when they first arrived. You also have the advantage of being around a large number of people that have the same common interest as you, albeit one based around work.

Get to know your co-workers and see whether these professional connections can turn into more personal ones. Don't be afraid to talk to people – as the new person in the office, you may be surprised how many of your colleagues are interested to learn more about you. And if you are one of the few non-locals, no problem – use this as an opportunity to practice your new language skills.

Look also for work-related activities you can participate in, such as organised sports or cultural activities. If they don't exist, be the one to organise them. If you prefer a more informal approach, simply see if any of your colleagues are interested in going for a group lunch or after-work drinks. These may not necessarily develop into solid friendships, but at the very least they will act as a bridge for you to meet even more people.

No doubt your weekdays are already dominated by work routines, but, when living as a single expat, having a regular routine for your non-work time is a great way to keep busy and avoid being alone at home, while also bringing more balance into your life.

A good way to start a routine is to look for things that interest you in your new city or even just in the local community and create a schedule around them. Plan at least one activity a week – even more if you have the time – and push yourself to follow through.

It doesn't have to be anything too dramatic. It could be trying one new restaurant a week, visiting a museum or attending a regular language or local culture class. Not only will you be exposed to lots of new people, many of whom will have similar interests, you will also learn more about your new location.

Try though not to take on too much, too soon. Build time into your routine for rest, healthy eating and the time needed for exercise and other leisure activities.



## 4. Build a routine

## 5.

### Reach out if you need to

Hopefully, those feelings of loneliness that you experience living as a single expat will only be temporary. But if the symptoms of loneliness start to linger and you think that the social and physical isolation you are experiencing is having a negative impact on your mental health – for example, leading to feelings of depression or elevated anxiety – then don't hesitate to reach out.

If you think you may need professional support, contacting your health insurance provider to see what support they can offer is a good place to start. Your policy will include mental health cover, including access to a range of mental health care and support in your new home, including psychiatrists, psychotherapy and more.