

# GLOMAD TO LOCAL:

Moving back home after time abroad can be difficult, you're still filtering life through a global mind-set. [Tricia Alach](#) explores this transition from glomad to glocal and shares some of her own insights she's gained along the way.

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Tricia Alach is a freelance consultant specialising in leadership development, talent management and OD. She has recently returned to live in NZ after 12 years as a glomad living in the Netherlands, the UK and the US. She is also the author of the [How to Have a Happy Homecoming](#) blog, which tells the stories of Kiwis returning to live in NZ.

Wow, it's hard to believe I've been back in NZ for over a year now. Posting the final blog in my first series of interviews has put me in something of a reflective mood wondering, what have I learned from my experience of returning to live in NZ after 12 years abroad?

Am I even still a glomad even though I'm quite happily ensconced in the Auckland suburbs, working in local government and planning long weekends to the Gold Coast? Or have I transitioned into something else - a glocal perhaps – still filtering my experiences through a global mind-set, even those experiences are increasingly local in form?



## Where ever you go, there you are

One of the key things to remember if you do decide to make the move back home to NZ is that all of you is coming too. That includes the curious, adventure seeking, intrepid aspects of yourself that provoked your initial desire to head off and see the world. Try as you might to shut the door, or position that part of your life as a 'phase', if those needs are a deep seated part of you, you'll have to accept that they are here to stay.

But the question is, what exactly are the needs that you have to keep meeting? With a bit of reflection I figured out that, in my case, the main reason I love living in different places is the novelty - the joy of experiencing things for the first time, starting to understand a new culture and continually learning something that I didn't previously know.

I've always loved the first year of being in a new country and got the urge to move on as soon as things became predictable, familiar or routine. So for me, as I enter this second year in NZ, the challenge is to keep things fresh, try different things and keep discovering the joy of the new in an increasingly familiar place.

But perhaps your driver isn't novelty, maybe it's something else. For many of the interviewees in the Happy Homecoming blog, immersing themselves in a different culture is the thing that really floats their boat. For others, it was the desire to make a professional contribution at the global level, to impact lives beyond NZ's borders and make a difference in the world.

## Cherish the connections, however fleeting

It's quite likely that, when you get back to NZ, you will spend much of your time feeling like the proverbial 'square peg in a round hole'. Old friendships aren't quite the same (more on this below), your workmates operate to a completely different frame of reference and, you keep getting a lot of the social norms wrong.

But, there will be those moments where you do unexpectedly connect with another square and (momentarily) feel at home. Cherish these moments and cultivate them when you can. And be aware that these connections are not always with people, but can also be evoked by an experience or even a place. For me, any time I'm in any environment with an 'international' feel, I instantly feel at home. Over the past year I've had this experience connecting with other expats, at comedy, writing and, film festivals or even just binge watching Scandi dramas on Netflix, getting super excited when I can actually understand some of the dialogue without the aid of the subtitles.

Which isn't to say that I don't appreciate or enjoy my local experiences as well. It's having a mix of experiences that connect to both the global and local aspects of myself that is helping create a sense of truly being at home.



## Ask yourself, would this have happened anyway?

A great temptation, when you return from a period of living abroad, is to attribute everything you experience to having been away. But this isn't always the case. A lot of the things we experience on our return might have happened anyway but because we weren't here, we just didn't know.

The most obvious examples relate to relationships, shifting family dynamics that take you by surprise or, the most common challenge for repats - old friendships that just aren't quite the same. This is often attributed to the different experiences you have each had in the time that you were away overseas and they were forging ahead with their life back home.

But the reality is that this friendship might never have stayed the course. The fact that you were driven to head off to have overseas adventures while they prioritised career, or family at home, might actually reflect a fundamental difference in your life orientation, or personality, which would have shown itself eventually, even if you had stayed at home.

And then there's the impact of ageing. Leaving as a young person with middle aged parents, coming back as a middle aged person with elderly parents can come as a bit of a shock. The reality is though that this would have happened anyway and there's no way of knowing whether not being away would have made this process easier or more difficult to go through.

## A process of experimentation, reflection and integration

So what I've learned about becoming a glocal is that the key is to figure out how to honour and incorporate those global aspects that have become a part of your core being, without getting stuck in the past. It's a continual process of experimentation and integration – trying new things, reflecting on what works and consciously choosing which aspects of my global orientation I want to bring into my local existence to create a life in NZ that I actually like.

My discussions with other repats also show that there is no one way to do this so embrace the fact that you may have different drivers, motivations and perspectives on the world to all the other people you might meet. This includes other returners because we are often just as different to each other as we are to those who have never left NZ.

Acknowledge the influences that have brought you to this point but accept your current situation for what it is. Don't place too much importance on how much of what you are experiencing is because you went away. Spend your energy figuring out what you need to be happy here in NZ, what you need to honour your unique needs and how you need to spend your time to make you feel at home.