

Expat Education – The Expat Guide to Choosing a School Overseas

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I often came across the expression Third Culture Kid (TCK) but admit I didn't truly understand it until I stumbled across an article in the Daily Telegraph by Ruth Van Reken, an international speaker on issues related to global family living, who gave some interesting insights into the phenomenon.

Another term used in this context, is Adult Third Culture Kid (ATCK) to describe adults who had this experience as children, and more recently, 'Triangles', expats who experience the challenges of repatriation.

Drs. Ruth and John Useem, both sociologists and anthropologists coined the phrase Third Culture in the 1950's when they were in India, initially to study the roles of Indians studying abroad. While there, they observed Americans living and working as Foreign Service officers, missionaries, businessmen, media representatives and similar roles. They also observed the behaviour of children attending schools set up for them to accompany their parents abroad.

Dr. Ruth Useem discovered that these families formed a cross-cultural lifestyle of shared experiences, what she called a 'third culture', one entirely different to either the first culture of their homeland or the second culture of their host country.

Of course, things have changed considerably since then, a time when expat families settled together in one area or when companies had no option but to form make-shift camp schools exclusively for the children of their employees who worked there.

Today, international careers take us from one country to another. Our children who follow suit benefit from a far greater choice in the school options available to them, allowing them to fully experience international life to the full.

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