

Meet the Flock

An interview with... Kellie Reynolds

The Ops Nest

What attracted you to working outside the UK?

When the opportunity to move to Abu Dhabi to work came up, it didn't take long for us to make a decision as a family. We had both always thought that living abroad would be interesting and so we were always open to the idea. The chance to expose our 2 children to a different culture, to meet and make friends with kids from all over the world and to see new places outweighed the downsides. From a work perspective, having worked on overseas shows from the UK I was keen to see how it would be different to be on the ground in the country.

What was your first international event and what's your lasting memory or 'take away' from it?

My first international event was a conference and exhibition in Copenhagen. It's so long ago I can't remember the name of the event. Being in Ops I was the first to fly out to get build up under way and I remember feeling a big sense of responsibility - being away from familiar venues and friendly contractors was quite scary. It's definitely worth investing the time in building a good relationship with the people you need support from to get the show open. You never know when you need to ask for a favour to overcome an unforeseen issue. I took a walk around the local area the first evening I was in Copenhagen and I was so worried about bumping into someone as I didn't know how to say sorry in Danish! Since then I try to learn a few useful words of the language before I go to a new country.

What unique challenges do you face running events in the UAE?

Most of the challenges I have faced since coming here in 2019 have related to the pandemic. Abu Dhabi has taken a very careful approach to dealing with covid and this has meant we have had to comply with some tight restrictions across our shows. What has been interesting is how the strict measures do seem to have given exhibitors and visitors more confidence that they will be as safe as possible at the shows. We spent a lot of time and effort communicating about the restrictions to try and prevent any confusion and make it simple. I do look forward to when we no longer need all the additional measures though, I must admit. We can use the time we have spent on planning additional communications to really up our game on customer care in new ways.

Do you have a top tip for managing cultural differences and language barriers?

The best piece of advice I ever heard was to always look for the things you have in common with other people, rather than the differences between you. This is brilliant advice when you travel for work - when you arrive in a new country and have to get straight to work it can be daunting. Looking for the similarities can help get off to the best start with new people - social media makes this easier now too. Looking up the people you are due to meet to see what they talk about or any contacts you have in common so you have an idea of their interests is a great help. Also smiling and being open and friendly works most of the time - when there is a language barrier a smile can go a long way

What piece of advice would you give to someone looking to work abroad?

I would say that if an opportunity comes up to go for it! One of the things I have come to realise is that compromise becomes more important in your work when you are abroad. Although the job of delivering the ops side of a show is essentially the same, there can be differences in the route that is taken in different countries. To try and push the methods you are used to onto people can be a mistake - it's much better to try and understand how and why things work differently and then look for the areas where your experience can help improve things.

What do you miss most about the UK?

I miss a lot of the fantastic contractors we have in the UK. People who are great fun to be on site with, hard-working and will do anything to help. We have some brilliant contractors here in the UAE too of course - but it takes time to build really trusting relationships. I also miss the creativity in the UK industry. I have only fully realised since moving away from the UK how our industry really is world-leading in the events field. It makes me proud.

You've recently signed up your team to the Ops Nest. What skills are you hoping they will develop through their involvement?

I am thrilled the team are all members and some of them have already started working through the masterclasses which will be brilliant for building their skills in specific areas. For me it's being part of a network to broaden their horizons that is the most exciting. Most of the team have not worked for any other organisers or venues so the Ops Nest gives them a great opportunity to learn from others in similar roles across different employers and countries.

If people would like to connect, where can they find you?

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