



The 50+ Red Flags of International Relocation

I. Documentation & Identity – “Paper Trail” Traps

1. Name mismatches

- Different versions of the same name across passport, work permit, and contracts (e.g., “Robert” vs. “Bob”).

2. Missing or inconsistent middle names

- Visas or permits missing legal middle names that appear on birth certificates or passports.

3. Passport validity too short

- Passports with less than 6 months’ validity remaining on the date of arrival.

4. Not enough blank pages

- Insufficient consecutive blank pages for visas, entry stamps, or residence permits.

5. Digital vs. wet-ink signatures

- Using an electronic signature where the destination country requires original pen-and-ink signatures.

6. Un-notarized or uncertified copies

- Providing plain photocopies of birth, marriage, or court documents without notarization, Apostille, or official certification.

7. Out-of-date marriage or civil status documents

- Relying on marriage or civil status documents that have not been re-issued or re-certified when required in stricter jurisdictions.

8. Non-certified translations

- Using translations from non-certified translators for legal or immigration documents.

9. Non-compliant ID photos

- Visa or permit photos that do not meet official requirements (wrong background color, size, or framing).

10. Inconsistent job titles

- Job title on the work permit not matching the title in the employment contract or employer support letter.

II. Customs & Cargo – The Physical Minefield

1. Undeclared “new” purchases

- Shipping items bought in the last few months and declaring them as used household goods.

2. Alcohol over the limit

- Sending personal wine or liquor collections without permits, declarations, or volume limits confirmed in advance.

3. Locked safes and containers

- Packing safes or locked trunks without sharing keys or combinations for inspection if required.

4. Non-compliant wood packaging

- Using pallets or wooden crates that lack proper ISPM-15 treatment and marking.

5. Hidden “comfort food” stash

- Packing meat, fresh or dried foods, seeds, plants, or spices that trigger agricultural controls or quarantine.

6. Lithium battery hazards

- Shipping lithium-ion batteries (tools, e-bikes, devices) in sea freight without following dangerous goods rules.

7. CBD, supplements, and “legal at home” products

- Sending CBD oil, supplements, or over-the-counter products that are controlled substances at destination.

8. Pornographic or offensive material

- Including adult material, media, or images that may be illegal or culturally unacceptable in conservative countries.

2 9. Sensitive political or religious items

- Shipping banned books, political material, or religious items that attract extra scrutiny.

10. Counterfeit or grey-market goods

- Packing bulk counterfeit or unlicensed luxury items and electronics.

11. High-value art without documentation

- Shipping paintings, sculptures, or collectibles without formal valuation or export permission where required.

12. Hidden cash or valuables

- Concealing money or high-value items inside furniture or boxes, raising money-laundering or smuggling concerns.

13. Firearms and ammunition without permits

- Treating hunting rifles or sports shooting equipment as regular household effects.

14. Soil and plant contamination

- Shipping garden tools, lawnmowers, or outdoor gear with soil or plant residue attached.

15. Major weight discrepancies

- Large gaps between estimated weight and actual shipment weight that suggest undeclared or misdeclared goods.

III. Timeline & Logistics – The Cost Killers

1. Shipment arrival before visa or status

- Containers reaching the port before the employee has a valid visa or residence stamp.

2. “Friday arrival” before long weekends

- Goods scheduled to land just before public holidays, driving up storage and demurrage fees.

3. Access restrictions at destination

- Sending 40-foot containers to addresses with narrow streets, height limits, or truck restrictions.

4. No understanding of free time or demurrage

- Not knowing port “free time” or storage rules before detention and demurrage charges start.

5. **No transit insurance**

- Assuming the mover's basic liability (pennies per pound/kilo) is the same as full replacement coverage.

6. **Under-insuring household goods**

- Declaring values based only on old purchase prices instead of realistic replacement costs.

7. **Missed delivery windows**

- Deliveries scheduled when no one is available to receive, causing redelivery charges and extended storage.

8. **Missing "goods to follow" declaration**

- Failing to declare follow-on shipments at initial entry, losing duty-free treatment on later arrivals.
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IV. Pet & Family Crises

1. **Incorrect timing of rabies titers and tests**

- Blood tests or vaccinations completed outside the exact timing rules set by the destination country.

2. **Microchip and vaccine sequence issues**

- Microchip implanted after the rabies vaccine, invalidating the shot under certain import rules.

3. **Crate non-compliance**

- Airline or IATA-non-compliant pet crates (too small, wrong design, or not properly ventilated).

4. **Breed-restricted pets**

- Moving dogs or other animals on restricted-breed lists into jurisdictions where they may be banned.

5. **School registration blocked by missing records**

- Children arriving without original, sealed, or properly certified school transcripts.

6. Immunization gaps for children

- Missing vaccines required by local school or public health authorities, delaying school start.

7. Dependent “age-out” mid-process

- Children turning 18 or 21 during the move and no longer qualifying as dependents under visa rules.

V. Financial & Personal Red Flags

1. Banking and address catch-22

- Needing a local address to open a bank account, but needing a bank account to secure a lease.

2. Credit history not portable

- Assuming a strong credit score in one country carries over automatically to another.

3. Misunderstood tax residency rules

- Not understanding when tax residency starts and how it affects income, benefits, and reporting.

4. Leases without diplomatic or break clauses

- Signing long-term leases without any provision to exit if the assignment or visa ends early.

5. Breaks in medical continuity

- Running out of long-term prescriptions before finding a local doctor, specialist, or pharmacy.

6. Vehicle non-compliance

- Shipping a vehicle that does not meet local emissions, safety, or right/left-hand drive requirements.

7. Voltage and plug incompatibility

- Plugging 110v appliances into 220v sockets without proper converters, risking damage or fire.

8. Spousal work and remote-work assumptions

- Spouses working remotely or locally without appropriate work authorization or tax planning.

9. Underestimating cash and “double rent” needs

- Not having enough liquid funds for deposits, first months’ rent, and overlapping housing costs.

10. No plan for the “Month 3” adjustment wall

- Ignoring emotional and mental health support when the initial excitement wears off and real adjustment begins.

11. No single point of coordination

- Multiple vendors and advisors operating in silos, with no central oversight to catch these red flags early.
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