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Expats Growing in Number as Profile Evolves

By Khristina Narizhnaya

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When Missouri native Brad Hicks, 40, found out his employer, international manufacturing and technology company Emerson, had an opening in Moscow for a finance director, he jumped at the chance.

"I was very intrigued by the opportunity to take a position where I could really make a difference," Hicks said. "Russia is a very important market for Emerson, so what we are doing here garners a lot of attention from our colleagues in the U.S."

Hicks relocated to Russia last January with his wife and two young daughters, after working two years for the company in Switzerland.

As Russia's economy grows, foreign specialists are slowly starting to come back, relocation experts said. The recession years of 2008 and 2009 saw a mass exodus of expatriates from the United States and Western Europe, but now expanding market opportunities and perks such

as lower taxes are drawing them back.

The majority of expatriates come for Russia's growing market and a sense of adventure, said Troika Relocations general manager David Gilmartin.

"They see the market as full of potential," Gilmartin said.

His company provides help finding schools and housing, and assistance with visas and immigration bureaucracy. Single men are the easiest to relocate, Gilmartin said. Relocating whole families is more challenging because, in addition to taking care of children's needs, social networks have to be found for spouses who often don't speak Russian.

About 50 percent of married male employees at Tesco, an oil and gas drilling equipment and technology provider, won't relocate to Russia because their wives are afraid that they will run off with a Russian woman, Tesco expat coordinator Anastasia Prokudina said.

Gilmartin, who has lived in Russia since 1996, said over the years the expat community has changed. Expatriates now mostly come to work in corporations, compared with the lone entrepreneurs that used to move to Russia in the early days.

The new wave is mostly made up of senior executives because the level of qualified Russians has grown, Gilmartin said.

Fewer expats are staying long term, Gilmartin said. The typical tour for an expatriate is about three years, compared with longer stays for those who arrived in the 1990s.

Since the end of the last economic crisis, the number of students from expatriate families has grown at the English International School, a 6-year-old private school that specializes in education of expat children, but enrollment has not yet reached pre-crisis levels, said headmaster Ross Hunter. Most students stay about three years.

Gilmartin sees increasing numbers of expats arriving in the near future. More companies are expanding into Russia, and the oil industry is growing, with state companies such as Rosneft looking for international partners. The upcoming Olympics in Sochi and the World Cup will attract foreign specialists, he said.

Other factors that will attract foreign specialists include infrastructure improvements, Russia's possible WTO entry and a more stable business environment — or at least the perception of one, following Putin's announced bid for the presidency.

Although the Hicks family is still adjusting to the challenges of life in Moscow, like long commutes, Brad Hicks is sure moving to Russia was the right choice.

"Since I've been here, I've not regretted the decision," he said. "Business is strong, and we are building a very solid team for growth."

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