

Taking Care Of Wellbeing On Short-Term Assignments

The advent of the new social order and a world where everything is seemingly available online and at your fingertips also makes it a more likely place where you or some of your fellow workers could feel insecure, left behind and feeling anxious. With so much information, news updates, social chat about, and more continually pouring in, the need to stay on top of it all can make you feel overwhelmed. This feeling of anxiety can be multiplied when there is an impending change of living location on the cards. To remain balanced and keep a sense of well-being, it is essential and highly beneficial to find sanctuary in a place inside or outside to relax and recharge in.

Companies who are sending people all over the world on short, or long-term assignments need to take this into account when relocating individuals and even more so when whole families are moving. Details concerning security, social connections, support and interaction with others in the new temporary location, city or foreign country, are essential for decision making – not just for the assignee (you) but possibly for their live-in partner also in many cases.

The work starts very early on in the sourcing process. Assignee involvement in the search helps create a more comfortable start and removes some of their 'no-nos', saving time being wasted - the assignee knows what they like or dislike. Searching for a temporary home isn't all that difficult, what is though, is the quality accreditation and confidence that what you have seen online is what you will get. This was one of the first obstacles in short-term accommodation sourcing we identified way back in the late 80's when there weren't recognisable brands - and this still is a barrier.

Meeting the 'tribal' needs of younger generations are best left to them or with close engagement in my view. The new trend of co-living brings in a new dynamic – this would cover much of the criteria just mentioned and may be favoured as well. Again, availability for this option will be limited to if there happens to be a property in the location you want or

not. This urban living lifestyle will probably be welcomed more by younger generations where there is an accepted and increasingly social and desired aspect to living closer together and meeting others with similar interests outside the assignment working community - a place to make new or meet friends as well. Most people are looking for a community feeling with meaningful social connections and involvement. Possibly, this co-living trend may be a substitute or replacement of the original community life which is disappearing more and more. Travel, assignments, urban growth and the trend for families to separate due to work or other social economic reasons means community life has structurally changed.

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Typically, these co-living options offer private sleeping quarters and have shared communal areas for cooking, dining and lounges for meetings or discussion. This isn't really that far away from what traditional hotels have offered in the past and present, i.e. rooms and public restaurants and lounges. But with this new social culture growing, and properties developed for this purpose, it can be a great solution for some.

The promise of lower costs of co-living for employers should be an attraction too and support would be expected to be readily forthcoming. However, 58% of companies that we surveyed recently for the Global Serviced Apartment Industry Report (due out early in 2020) indicated they wouldn't permit this option, 26% had an open mind and only 16% saying they would permit this. I believe we will see a greater adoption when we do our next report survey in 15 months or so and watching developments here closely.

Other assignees may consider space and security to be paramount and not want a close living lifestyle – traditional serviced apartments provide for this option well and also offer support with someone on hand to assist with most matters.

When searching, you will see lots of options and then the subsequent refining of the search down to essential elements is only a part of it. A helpful look over the shoulder and expert guidance by a professional would be appreciated by most and would help avoid any pitfalls the inexperienced might fall into. After all, how many times have you personally searched entirely on your own and relocated for stays of more than a few weeks/months? As a professional HR person, you are doing this all the time and your views are important – most assignees will hopefully see this.

Another consideration is wellbeing. This is of paramount importance to employers who know that a healthy person works best when they are feeling well, but some of the factors involved in a transfer to another country and culture may have a negative - even though maybe only temporarily – impact on this. Finding yourself in an environment that is not familiar could have a detrimental impact. Offering cultural awareness information for business travel as well as for relocating assignees can help to appreciate and enjoy the diversity of the world when working away from home. These are things that we all want to avoid but are a real factor in today's world. Mental health suffers, and the resulting risk of lapse of focus on the trip's purpose should be evaluated, discussed and prepared for. Seeking support from local contacts, networks and interest groups should be researched and ideas identified early on – recommendations of where to go and where to avoid will help educate the transferee and give more clarity about the destination. This is generally well understood

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in the relocation industry where longer-term assignments are more typical, but in shorter stays away in the business travel sector, this may not be as well understood. Being away from friends and family and the separation of familiar emotional support can be set aside and even replaced for a short while by new acquaintances, but not be overlooked.

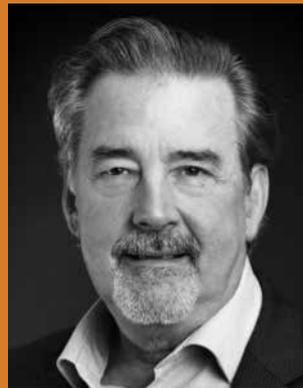
Accommodation providers can help, and could take note that John Lewis & Partners recently carried out some research and found that just over half those surveyed believed a

restful living area should be a 'space for quiet and calm reflection' with three quarters wanted 'to read' and one fifth 'for yoga, mindfulness or exercise and not just a place to watch TV to switch off'. Natural materials, light, indoor plants and reducing clutter were also added benefits.

For those who are relocating or on business trips away, my recommendation is to take a day or two off on arrival, switch off from work and go explore some of the new places near you – museums, parks and also go

to a spa. Simple enough, but you have to just do it, and not let yourself dive straight into a busy working schedule. A day or two off will reap dividends in wellbeing.

For those professionals that arrange transfers or trips, a focus on alleviating the potential stress that can occur before and during a move is the best way forward - prevention is better rather than cure. The holistic approach involves little effort - no more than you would normally willingly give to a friend or family in need of assistance.



CHARLIE McCROW

Charlie McCrow, CEO, has been the driving force behind The Apartment Service's 38 years success and is a longstanding member of several industry bodies including CHPA, ARP, ERC, ITM, EuRA and UKAA as well as a founder member of the UK's Association of Serviced Apartment Providers (ASAP).

Under his leadership the company has been at the forefront of innovation in the sector, the latest example of which is the TAS Alliance. The Alliance is the fourth and newest business in McCrow's portfolio, joining independent global booking agency The Apartment Service, European extended stay brand Roomspace Serviced Apartments, and the Global Serviced Apartments Industry Report.

Charlie's investment in technology and people has helped power the growth of the serviced apartment industry, also has a long history of alliances with independent operators to provide end-to-end short term stay solutions for buyers and travellers globally.

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