

Starting up

Pune in India is considered a challenger city when compared to Mumbai and Delhi. What do you think is meant by 'challenger city'?

What are the potential difficulties for expatriates who are sent to live and work in smaller cities in countries like India and China?

Reading

Living and working as an expatriate in smaller cities in India or China has its challenges. To find out more, read the article and then do the questions that follow.

Relocations to rough-edged challenger cities is on the rise

When Vandana Saxena Poria moved to India to found Get Through Guides, a professional education company, she checked out the obvious locations in which to start a business - Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore - only to settle upon little-noticed Pune. It was a choice that baffled her family. But, standing on street corners observing motorcyclists whizzing by, the British-born accountant sensed that with its large student population, and burgeoning tech base, Pune was a city on the rise.

A decade on, Pune continues to progress. Power cuts, once a daily annoyance, are a fading memory and the opening of several well-equipped hospitals has made finding high-quality healthcare straightforward. Yet in some respects, this city of 5.5m people is still playing catch-up.

Yet Pune and cities like it play an outsized role. About 400 emerging market cities will contribute almost half of growth in global gross domestic product before 2025, analysis by the McKinsey Global Institute finds.

On the frontline of development, these challenger cities are advancing, yet retain rough edges. They may lack the cosmopolitan populations and amenities of first-tier cities: world-class hospitals, international schools, robust power supplies, and places where expats can stock up on favourite foods or hang out with compatriots.

Expats, returnees and global mobility managers agree that frontier working has its pleasures and pains - a culture shock for those who have not anticipated the lack of home comforts.

"If you imagine wanting to grab a meal, or a beer, or even watch a TV programme, all those things are impossible unless you can speak and read Chinese," says one British automotive executive, recently returned from a third-tier manufacturing city in China. By contrast, in Shanghai, he knew where to find western brands and English-speaking sales assistants.

Ms Saxena Poria found she could manage with English and some Hindi, but without Marathi, the local language, Pune's culture eluded her. So she took lessons from her staff in order to experience the local Marathi theatre for which Pune is renowned.

It is not only language skills that divide leading cities from their neighbours, their mores may differ too. Sam Sawers, an auditor with PwC in London, contrasts the domesticity of Chennai, where he spent two years, with cosmopolitan Bangalore. "In Chennai, a lot of socialising revolves around family and the temple. Drinking alcohol is a bit of a taboo."

Such nuances should be heeded, says Tim Willis, a director at security specialists International SOS and Control Risks. "In a main city you may be able to get away with things which in a secondary city could cause difficulties." Examples include wearing a skimpy sundress or displaying affection as a gay couple.

Will the secondees adapt? Before sending staff to emerging cities, it is crucial to ask: "Does this person have the cultural agility, as well as the business skills, to succeed?" says Max Newbigging, global mobility manager at Old Mutual Group.

Reading Comprehension

Based on the information in the article, find answers to these questions

- 1 Which cities in India did Vandana Saxena Poria consider as possible locations for setting up her new company in India?
- 2 Why did she decide to set up her business in Pune?
- 3 What gave Vandana Saxena Poria the impression that Pune was a city on the rise?
- 4 What is the population of Pune?
- 5 What was the finding in the analysis by McKinsey Global Institute into the future role of emerging market cities?
- 6 What is meant by a first-tier city?
- 7 What kind of amenities do so-called first-tier cities in countries like India or China have that challenger cities often lack?
- 8 What difficulties are mentioned by a British expatriate about living in a smaller city in China compared to living in Shanghai?
- 9 What was one of the problems that Vandana Saxena Poria had about settling down in Pune?
- 10 How does Sam Sawers of PwC describe the lifestyle in Chennai in India?
- 11 What two kinds of behaviour are given as examples to avoid by foreigners in smaller cities in countries such as India?

Vocabulary 1

Find words and phrases in the article with the definitions which follow

- 1 confused, unable to understand (para 1)
- 2 expanding quickly (para 1)
- 3 disappearing slowly (para 2)
- 4 trying to get better, to get to the next level (para 2)
- 5 bigger than you would expect (para 3)
- 6 in a leading position (para 4)
- 7 less sophisticated features (para 4)
- 8 facilities that make life more comfortable (para 4)
- 9 strong and unlikely to stop working (para 4)
- 10 was difficult to find (para 7)
- 10 famous, well known (para 7)
- 11 customs, habits and traditions (para 8)
- 12 when something should not be mentioned or discussed (para 8)
- 13 taken account of (para 9)
- 14 when an item of clothing covers very little of the body (para 9)

Vocabulary 2

Match these phrasal verbs (1-6) that appear in the article with the definitions (a-f)

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1 check out | a spend social time with friends |
| 2 settle upon | b escape criticism for doing things which you shouldn't do |
| 3 stock up on | c investigate |
| 4 hang out with | d buy in large quantities |
| 5 revolves around | e choose, select |
| 6 get away with | f has as a very important part |

Discussion points

- 1 What skills and qualities would give someone cultural agility?
- 2 To understand and adapt to a different culture, it is useful to know what that culture's values are. What are the values in your culture, the aspects of life and thought which are fundamental to the way that people live and act?

KEY**Reading Comprehension**

- 1 Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore
- 2 Because she saw it as a city on the rise
- 3 Its large student population, and burgeoning tech base
- 4 5.5 million
- 5 About 400 emerging market cities will contribute almost half of growth in global gross domestic product before 2025
- 6 A large, cosmopolitan city with lots of amenities
- 7 Cosmopolitan populations and amenities such as world-class hospitals, international schools, robust power supplies, and places where expats can stock up on favourite foods or hang out with compatriots
- 8 It is difficult to go to a restaurant or a bar, or even watch a TV programme, unless you can speak and read Chinese. By contrast, in Shanghai, it is easy to find western brands and English-speaking sales assistants
- 9 Without knowing Marathi, the local language, Pune's culture was difficult to get into
- 10 A lot of socialising revolves around family and the temple. Drinking alcohol is a bit of a taboo
- 11 Wearing a skimpy sundress or displaying affection as a gay couple

Vocabulary 1

- 1 baffled
- 2 burgeoning
- 3 fading
- 4 playing catch-up
- 5 outsized
- 6 on the frontline
- 7 rough edges
- 8 amenities
- 9 robust
- 10 eluded
- 11 renowned
- 12 mores
- 13 taboo
- 14 heeded
- 15 skimpy

Vocabulary 2

- 1 c
- 2 e
- 3 d
- 4 a
- 5 f
- 6 b

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