

Published by Career Verdict: The Magazine for Law School Graduates
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Going Global: Working outside of Canada is an increasingly popular option for young lawyers. The challenge lies in finding the right opportunity — then adapting to legal work on foreign soil.

James Cummings has travel in his blood, and a thirst for business and legal challenges.

As Manager, Law and Contracts, for Canadian Nexen Petroleum Yemen, the 1999 University of Calgary law school graduate is challenged in new ways every day.

“We have to take into account different laws: Yemeni, British, American, Canadian...any country Canadian Nexen does business with,” explains Cummings. His practice is concentrated in the oil and gas sector, with some general corporate and commercial work as well.

At any one time, Canadian Nexen Petroleum in Yemen — which is publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange — has approximately 500 people in the field comprised of around 200 expatriates (mainly British, Canadian and American) and locals.

Its Masila Block in central Yemen has just produced the one-billionth barrel of oil. To put this into perspective, the field produces 230,000 barrels a day. The Yemen project's capital and operating budget weighs in at almost one-half billion US dollars annually. The legal paperwork regarding much of this crosses Cummings's desk.

The sheer volume of work explains why his job has hours that would make some lawyers cringe. But for him, his 35-day rotational job—35 days in Yemen and then a similar number of days back at home in Calgary—with its seven day a week, 12-hour days when in Yemen, is all taken in stride.

That's because he enjoys working with the Yemenis. Meetings with them have a different rhythm and pattern than in North America, he explains, and they rely more heavily on local etiquette and customs.

"Meetings are much more social, and are conducted wearing a THOBE (the national dress), while chewing QAT (tobacco). You talk about soccer, the weather and items in the news. Then you talk about business."

In Cummings's opinion, many graduating law students underestimate the type of opportunities that exist for working abroad. Cummings had worked for Nexen Inc. in Calgary, so when the opportunity presented itself to work for the company in its overseas office in Yemen, he jumped at the chance.

He endorses the idea that international experience can be a beneficial step in gaining additional and alternative exposure, compared to that of the more traditional Canadian law firm experience.

Exciting Opportunities

"Many firms have some international components to their practice, and more and more are valuing international experience that lawyers who have previously worked overseas bring to their firm," says Maryanne Forrayi, Career Advisor, Faculty of Law Career Services, University of Calgary.

The Canadian Bar Association (CBA) has recognized the importance of giving young lawyers international experience through the CBA Young Professionals International Program. "The goals of this program are to help human rights legal organizations abroad, and to assist young lawyers in obtaining employment in the field of law and international human rights legal work," explains Forrayi.

Gillian Ready, LL.B., Director of Career Services at Queen's University's Faculty of Law, agrees that there are many exciting opportunities for lawyers outside of Canada, "both immediately after students finish law school, and later on in their careers," she says.

"For students with interests in public international law, human rights, or development, there are internship opportunities with public and not-for-profit agencies," she says, and cites the example of a former student who worked for the United Nations High Commission for Refugees in Geneva. "It may even be possible, occasionally, to count part of the time working overseas for such bodies towards the articling requirement in a Canadian province," she says, although she cautions students to check with the relevant provincial law society before making any plans.

A Different Lifestyle

When he's in Yemen, Cummings—who started his job in January 2004—lives in a walled compound with armed guards around it; when he travels between his apartment and office, a car with armed guards follows behind his vehicle.

This is a different lifestyle than when, from January to December 2002, he lived in Kuwait with his wife and four-month old son, working for the Kuwaiti government's international oil and gas company KUFPEC (Kuwait Foreign Petroleum Exploration Company). While at that job, Cummings and his family found their own apartment and learned to shop and maneuver around with help from friendly expatriates and locals.

Kuwait is a harsh country climatically; hot in the summer and dusty in the winter. Most expatriates live there for five years or less, and then move on to other adventures. "So, they understand what it's like to come there with no experience of that country, and they are really helpful," he says. While he enjoyed working in Kuwait, the political situation became somewhat destabilized, and he chose to move with his family to greater safety back home in Calgary.

Seek Firms with International Offices

Cummings has worked for both a government agency (in Kuwait) and now for a publicly-traded corporation with foreign business dealings. Another way to gain international experience is through Canadian law firms with international offices.

"It may be a little bit harder if you want to be in private practice, depending on the geographic location," says Ready, who is admitted to practice in England, "Yet some Canadian law firms have offices in other countries, so lawyers with an interest in living abroad often find their way to foreign countries that way," she says.

"There are also some countries where it is much easier to be admitted to practice than others," she continues. For example, Canadians with a law degree can write the bar examination in New York state or Massachusetts, and quite a few Canadian law graduates are working in private firms in New York and Boston, although the market for recent graduates in those cities has cooled off in the last couple of years.

It may also be possible to be admitted as a lawyer in other countries, particularly those belonging to the British Commonwealth, although "without a connection to the jurisdiction it can be difficult to find employment," Ready adds.

Career offices and officers are relatively new at Canadian law schools, she notes; still, there is a recognition that some graduates definitely will be looking for experiences outside Canada.

"At Queen's, we're actively working on several projects designed to help students gain information about a variety of international opportunities," she says. As the career offices at Canadian law schools grow, they will be able to offer more information and support to students interested in working overseas.

Test the Waters with an Exchange

There are a number of ways to determine, while still attending law school, whether you will enjoy living and working abroad.

Queen's Faculty of Law runs some very interesting law school exchanges to the Netherlands, France and Australia, for example. During the summer months, the Faculty also offers programs in public international law and international business law at Queen's International Study Centre at Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex, England. The summer programs are also open to students from other law schools.

"The exchanges and summer programs let students experience what it's like to live overseas. It helps them explore the international experience, and may make choosing to work abroad after law school seem like an attainable goal," Ready explains. "There have been a few cases where the students fell in love with the countries they visited, and ended up looking for jobs there after they graduated."

At the University of Calgary, a new project being developed is faculty-specific web pages, within the career services web site, that focus on working abroad advises Forrayi. The pages include information, for example, on public interest law such as United Nations Organizations and the Canadian International Development Agency; and lists a number of International Law Societies. The pages also offer suggestions and tips for working abroad and evaluating opportunities.

As well, the Faculty of Law is developing exchange programmes with law schools abroad. Currently, the Faculty has participated in a formal exchange programme with the University of Oslo in Norway says Forrayi. Some financial assistance is available for students wishing to participate in international legal studies through the support of Macleod Dixon, an international law firm.

"Law schools, such as ours, are definitely developing tools to help our students who may want to work abroad," she says. "We realize that international experience may be very advantageous for students, given the global nature of business today."

In Cummings's case, the Canadian Nexen position in Yemen allows him to use his skills quite fully. "I feel I am making the most of my legal and business education," he says.

He admits that he misses family and friends while working overseas, but "there's always e-mail and phone calls. I think the benefits of working abroad outweigh the negatives.

"You've got to enjoy your career," he says. "Your career is going to consume most of your life, so you have an obligation to yourself to make it the most enjoyable you can."

Sidebars

Get Connected

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade: Centre for Intercultural Learning—Courses for Canadians Working Overseas
<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/cfsi-icse/cil-cai/overseas-en.asp>

Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade: Working Abroad—Unraveling the maze
http://www.voyage.gc.ca/main/pubs/working_abroad-en.asp

York University: Work Abroad information from the book *The Canadian Guide to Living and Working Abroad* by Jean-Marc Hachey
http://www.yorku.ca/careers/resources_jobs_workabroad.htm

Helpful Hints for Living and Working Abroad

Barry Appleton, an international trade lawyer, logged 200,000 air miles last year. As managing partner of Appleton & Associates International Lawyers, headquartered in Toronto, he's lived, worked and set up offices in England, emerging markets in Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America.

Here are his top four tips for living and working abroad:

- **Embrace the locals and their customs.**

In some countries you may be restricted or required to live in sequestered communities. If this is not the case, spend time in the local community. Don't spend time only in the expatriate community. Appleton met a Canadian who loved to paint the desert. Make real connections with the local communities to enhance your experience abroad.

- **Don't forget the marvelous resources of the ex-pat community.**

Members of the ex-pat community already know how to find housing, groceries and other daily chores expeditiously. They are usually very receptive and helpful to new ex-pats coming over. Since many ex-pats have lived abroad for years, they are often well-known and well-connected and can help you with finding business opportunities. Also, check to see if there is a "mixed" chamber of commerce, for example, the Canadian-Chilean Chamber of Commerce.

- **Build contacts with local business people.**

In many countries, it's as much about your network as it is about your skills when it comes to respect in your workplace and social acceptance. When a contact gives you a name, you must treat this as an act of friendship and trust.

- **Don't be afraid to be Canadian.**

Canadians are generally liked and admired all over the world. Be yourself. There are many Canadians working overseas; one time Appleton was travelling in a remote part of China and recognized a Canadian by her attire as her pants were made by Tilley, a Canadian manufacturer. Generally, Canadians are very welcome in business communities.