

Name: Mitch, 26 years old

Home country: Australia

Education: Double Degree in Commerce and Arts

Occupation in home country: Worked in an economic consulting firm specializing in competition law

Moved to Finland: In June 2019

Languages: English, Chinese

Intercultural relationship: Mitch's girlfriend is Finnish

"MY PATH": my story before Finland, in Finland, my goals and hopes

Mitch moved to Finland from Australia about a year ago to live with his Finnish girlfriend. For an easier integration process, he avoided developing any expectations about his life in the new country. The only preconceived notion he had before coming to Finland was an administrative aspect of immigrating and paperwork. He was stressed out by a probability of not getting a residence permit for whatever reason and being prohibited from staying in Finland. However, the process of getting a visa went smoothly and Mitch got a positive decision in a few weeks. He points out that the most challenging time was waiting for the decision to come. His girlfriend's emotional support and talking to her about his fears was very helpful to stay in a good mood and carry on with his daily routine.

Mitch's tip № 1: Don't be afraid of sharing your fears and concerns regarding a new life abroad with your partner. Having been living in a country for all their life, they might not be aware of what you are going through, but will be happy to help you.

INTERCULTURAL FAMILY/COUPLE

Mitch's path collided with his girlfriend during his last year at university, where she was doing her exchange semester. They have been together for almost a year, when she went back to Finland, as she needed to continue studying at her university. After being in a long-distance relationship for some time, Mitch decided to quit his job in Australia and move to Finland to be together with her.

Mitch was born in a Chinese family. When he started dating his girlfriend, they had to go through some difficulties related to other people's image of them as a couple. Asian people in Australia are often perceived as those lacking attraction or nerdy people. Thus, some people would voice their doubts on why they are together. However, they both agreed if people cannot see someone from different cultures being together, it is these individuals' own biases, which should not affect their relationship.

Having different cultural backgrounds, sometimes it is challenging for the couple to come to a consensus in some aspects of life. For example, Mitch inherited a family orientation from the Chinese culture where all members are very close to each other. On the contrary, in his girlfriend's family everyone is rather independent. She is not used to participating in family gatherings often but understood that it was important for Mitch and takes part in them every time. In turn, Mitch is transforming his attitude to work-life balance. Being raised in an achievement and success-oriented culture, he can work for days without breaks. His girlfriend often felt they did not spend enough time with each other due to him being busy. He was able to adjust his schedule, so that they could enjoy time together and have proper rest.

Overall, Mitch says that they approach their diverse backgrounds as an opportunity for learning and explore their cultures with curiosity. He believes that being different brings a lot of growth for them both as a couple and individuals.

Mitch's tip № 2: Take your and your partner's different cultural backgrounds as a strength and approach them with curiosity and open mind.

FINNISH LANGUAGE

Mitch sees the language as a huge component of an integration process, although for now, English is enough for him to make friends and be practically integrated. In a couple, they speak English, which is enough to express emotions and explain themselves.

Mitch started learning Finnish upon his arrival in Helsinki. His girlfriend's mother gave him a study book for beginners that he used for independent learning, spending an hour on it every day. His girlfriend was also very involved in his language learning. For example, every Saturday the couple would go to a cafe and speak only Finnish to each other. However, as time went by, this activity tailed off because Mitch was not at that level he would be able to reply and keep the conversation going, which he felt bad about.

For now, Mitch is busy with finding a study place for next year and temporarily quit learning Finnish. However, he does not feel right imposing himself on the local people when they have to switch to English to talk to him. He would like to continue improving his Finnish skills in the future.

Mitch's tip № 3: Find a way of learning Finnish that you enjoy, be it together with your partner or independently. Forcing yourself to learn in a manner that does not suit you perhaps can bring short-term results but most likely will not work in the long run.

EMPLOYMENT

The culture where Mitch grew up is oriented on building a structured and economically relevant career, which can bring material and practical outcomes. He was interested in being creative and wanted to pursue an artistic career when he was in high school but chose working at an economic consulting firm to provide himself a stable life. He assumes that he did not have enough time after university to reflect on his aspirations and goals, which led to a wrong career choice. His recommendation for recent graduates would be taking time after graduation to explore a labor market, do internships at different companies and industries to get a better idea of what one enjoys doing.

Coming to Finland was a perfect chance to reconsider his career choice. Now, he would like to begin his career path as a programmer at a Finnish company. His ultimate goal is to have his own independent game development studio with offices established in Finland and Australia. Mitch admits that partly his girlfriend's mindset and view of life were a driver of change. She encourages him to find his own professional path in Finland, rather than taking any job to be able to contribute financially to their relationship.

Mitch's job hunting strategy involves mostly networking, attending different seminars, hackathons and other game development events. He highlights the importance of participating in events organized within one's industry of interest, as it is a great opportunity for meeting professionals already working in an industry and getting insights on recruitment and trends. Going there for the first time must be terrifying but all it takes is to get to know one person at an event who can introduce one to new connections. As a result, by attending such events, Mitch found an interesting project to participate in, signed up for volunteering at Slush and made friends who share his passion for games!

Mitch's tip № 4: Explore an industry of your interest by attending events, workshops, seminars, etc. with an attitude of learning something new rather than getting a job straight away.

