

Title: When you stop moving, the world changes

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I was having lunch a few weeks ago with another expat friend who was discussing the construction at the train station in Den Haag. She marveled that she was amazed that she had seen the station prior to the construction beginning and expects to see it when it is complete. For an international, seeing the before, during and after of a major building project is practically unthinkable.

Internationals develop an entire skillset based around their frequent relocations. You learn to make friends quickly. You discover the best methods for shipping food from home. Bureaucracy that only appears in Kafka novels doesn't phase you. No one packs better than someone who flies multiple times a year.

But there are things you don't learn. Like patience with large building projects. And cultivating long term friendships with people who you continue to see every day. Convincing yourself to buy nice furniture. Or a houseplant. How to create space to learn a new language. What, exactly, you do with yourself when you're not orchestrating a move every couple of years.

I was finalizing some tax paperwork a few weeks ago and I had to log in to a student loan system to get a final bit of information. The system asked me to select which of the following addresses were places that I had resided. Eventually I had to call and verify my identity because I couldn't pick, from a list of ten, which ones I had called home.

I am planning to take the inburgering exams in August and if learning Dutch and how to properly dispose of fryer oil isn't settling down, I don't know what is. What's worse than learning Dutch? Learning how to keep being friends with people after a year or two. Learning how to not write off investing in your local community because you don't plan to be there long enough for it to matter. Understanding that that goddamn construction project is going to impede your commute for years.

Anyone who has moved, whether to another country or a few towns over, knows that you can't really ever go home. Moving changes you. And, after awhile, you realize that accepting not changing can be as difficult as accepting change.