



Overseas PCS Survival Guide

Planning for Your Big Move

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Getting the News

When you learn that you'll be moving overseas with a military PCS, you're likely to alternate between feelings of excitement and near panic.

What should we pack? Can we bring our appliances? How will we ship our pet? Where will our kids go to school? What about our vehicle?

These are all valid and common questions! Many of the details of an overseas move are the same as a move within the continental U.S. (CONUS), but there are some key differences. Consider this e-book your starting point to work through what you'll need to get ready for your relocation.

While military personnel or civilian travel offices will provide counseling and checklists (including information regarding passports, travel, customs, and medical clearance), be sure to check out the [It's Your Move](#) document offered by TRANSCOM and [Plan My Move](#) from Military OneSource.



MilitaryByOwner has put together tips for you as you prepare for your overseas adventure. Consider this your starting point!

Your PCS Binder

Begin to organize the following paperwork that you'll need to hand-carry:

- Copies of orders
- Powers of attorney, if applicable
- Vehicle shipping information
- Birth certificates
- Marriage license
- Child custody paperwork
- Car titles and insurance policies
- Moving documents
- Hotel and flight reservations
- Children's school records
- Veterinarian paperwork, including shot records
- Passports and copies of passports
- List of contact numbers, in case your cell phone doesn't work in the new area

Will this be a "command sponsored" or an "unaccompanied" tour?

Command sponsored dependents will be on military orders and have access to military installation resources.

Unaccompanied tours are shorter assignments with few resources available for families or a place that the military doesn't feel is safe for dependents.

Some families will choose to go without command sponsorship to certain locations anyway, but keep in mind you may not have access to military facilities or services.



✓ PCS Binder Must-Haves



Shipping Documents

When your home is engulfed in packing paper and brown boxes, you'll want to keep all of the moving company paperwork secure, including the Inspection Sheet, which notes scratches or dings on your goods.



High Value Items

In the rush of the busy move time, keep tabs on the papers that itemize your High Value Items, such as electronics or antiques.



Medical Records

For some, the service member's health and dental records are transferred electronically to the next duty station. For others, the service member's records are sealed and hand-carried.



Dental Records

Records of treatment received from civilian providers will need to be collected. With a copy of orders, records should be available without paying a fee. Plan to collect records early on in the moving-prep game, as it may take a little while to generate copies.



Copies of Orders

During a PCS, everything revolves around official military orders. You'll need many copies of these for everything from coordinating transportation to arranging housing.



School Records

As soon as you have orders in hand, place your request for the sealed transcript and any standardized testing results. You can also ask for recommendation letters for ease of acceptance into programs at the next school.

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Budgeting for Your Overseas Move

You've probably heard someone say, "Well, at least the military moves you!" While that may be true, there are still expenses--some expected and some unforeseen--that are part of a military relocation.

MilitaryByOwner's free e-book, [Quick and Easy Steps to Prepare for Your PCS Move](#), includes a helpful section on budgeting for a PCS, including preparing for the unexpected. While you're likely familiar with the military's Dislocation Allowance, COLA (Cost of Living Allowance), and reimbursement for Personally Procured Moves, it's wise to plan ahead. Finances aren't always the most fun topic for discussion, but consider setting aside funds for the following:

1. Maintenance and Repairs

Whether it's carpet stains, broken fixtures, or other damages in the house you're renting, consider getting an estimate of how much repairs will set you back and how much of your deposit you'll be seeing again.



Travel Expenses

Once you've moved out of your home, you'll probably need lodging before leaving your installation, as well as at your new duty station.

The Temporary Lodging Allowance will cover "A number of days deemed sufficient, but ordinarily, not more than 60 days" on arrival overseas. (Source: [Defense Travel Management Office](#))

It's vital to know the lodging reimbursement rates. You can find rates using the [Per Diem Rates Query](#) calculator.

Use those rates to calculate the reimbursement based on your particular family's needs using the [Computing Temporary Lodging Expenses](#) guide from TMO. Here, you'll find reimbursements to cover both lodging and meals.

Food

Restocking the pantry may incur a grocery bill far larger than any holiday shopping grocery trip.

When making your grocery list, consider the pantry items that you'll actually use during your first week or two by making a meal plan and purchasing only those items.

That will help spread out the costs of buying all of your favorite spices and specialty food items over several shopping trips.

Help! I can't afford to move!

After reviewing all of the expenses for your PCS, you may find that your family's budget simply doesn't cover the additional expenses.

In such a case, you don't need to whip out your credit card, drop into the local lending shark, withdraw from retirement, or even pawn your engagement ring.

The government permits a one-time pay advance with each PCS through the Military Advance Pay. The amount advanced is repaid over the course of a year.

This is an advantage over using a credit card or any other form of loan as it is a zero percent interest loan, and loan repayments are automatically deducted from the service member's pay.

However, if you have already made your budget for your new location, then make sure to deduct the monthly repayment before requesting the pay advance.



If you're a homeowner, you'll probably choose to have a home inspection before putting your house on the market to rent or sell, not to mention home staging, advertising, realty fees, and any needed repairs/maintenance.

2. Mortgage Payment

If you own a home, there will likely be a gap between the day you move out and the day your tenants or the new homeowners move in.

Continued mortgage payments during this time may be the costliest part of your move.

3. Pets

Allow room in your budget for vaccinations, health checks, quarantines, boarding fees, and travel costs. If you're flying your pet, you may also be required to purchase a crate that is airline approved.

4. Vehicles

If you have more than one car, think about whether you'll sell or ship the second vehicle. The government will only ship one POV, so if you choose to ship a second, it will be on your own dime.

5. Restocking Your New Home

You'll need to replace perishable goods, cleaning supplies, and items like new curtains for the windows that aren't the same size as any of the curtains you currently own. However, keep in mind that you'll likely be receiving a Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) in your overseas location which will help offset expenses.

important overseas paperwork

1

copies of orders

valid U.S. driver's license

2

3

overseas medical clearance

school and vet records

4

5

passports

Downsizing Your Belongings

Housing overseas may be much smaller than what you're used to in the U.S. Take some time before the movers arrive to organize and deal with any excess.

Start with the "Four Box" system when going through clutter:

- Box 1 - Put back where it belongs
- Box 2 - Donate or try to sell
- Box 3 - Find a place to keep this
- Box 4 - Throw away

Then ask yourself the four essential questions about what you're wanting to keep:

- 1) Does it serve a purpose?
- 2) Is it being used?
- 3) Are there multiples?
- 4) Does it draw emotion?

Remember that you may be eligible for temporary storage while you're stationed overseas where you can store sentimental or larger items that you may not have space for, so don't pitch everything!

Free Resources for Your Move

MilitaryByOwner offers detailed checklists for the weeks and months leading up to any PCS with our series of free e-books:

- ❖ [Quick and Easy Steps to Prepare for Your PCS](#)
- ❖ [Avoid PCS Move Wipeout](#)
- ❖ [Bloom Where PCS Plants You!](#)
- ❖ [You Gotta Laugh: Funny PCS Stories](#)

Next, it might be time to make a little cash. Hold your best garage sale ever with

[Ten Tips for a Successful Garage Sale](#)



Other considerations when preparing your belongings for an overseas move:

Regardless of where you're headed, you'll need to divide up your household goods (HHG) into several categories.

Unaccompanied baggage:

This shipment will include things you'll need right away at your destination and will typically arrive much sooner than your other HHG. Your transportation office will tell you the weight allowance for this shipment.



Non-temporary storage: These are items that you likely won't use while overseas--things like seasonal clothing or larger items which can be stored in a warehouse in the U.S. for the duration of your overseas tour.

Professional items: Sort out professional gear, those things you need in order to do your job at your destination, so they don't count against your total HHG weight allowance and will be packed separately. Spouses may also be allowed up to 500 lbs. of pro gear as well, for items used in their employment or community/volunteer activities. Check with your transportation office or move.mil for the latest guidance.

Voltage differences: Your appliances are built for U.S. electrical systems—you won't be able to simply plug them in your overseas home and will need to purchase transformers or converters first. It's advisable to wait to do this until your arrival, as not only are transformers heavy and expensive, but folks PCS'ing *out* of the area will be eager to unload theirs. The military may also loan you transformers; your [overseas sponsor](#) will be a good resource for this information. You may also need to put large appliances such as your washer and dryer into storage, as these are often provided by the military during your overseas tour.

What Can I Ship Overseas?

Understanding the Regulations Before Your Packout Date

1.



Your Vehicle

The gov't will typically ship one vehicle.

Motorcycles may be shipped either as a separate POV shipment or in your HHG shipment, depending on host country regulations. You may also be eligible for government storage of your POV if local laws prohibit or the vehicle requires modification to be allowed in country.

2.

Firearms

Must comply with Bureau of ATF regulations.

When shipping firearms, you must abide by the laws of the host country. When returning firearms from overseas to the US, you're required to identify firearms on your individual customs declarations and applicable ATF forms.



3.



Other items

What about items like boats, trailers, and alcohol?

For regulations regarding shipment of more uncommon items such as boats, boat trailers, mobile homes, alcoholic, etc. you will need to check with your transportation office.

Learning About the New Location

First Stop: Your Overseas Sponsor

Depending on where you're headed, you may be envisioning holidays in Paris, traveling in Asia, or antique hunting in quaint European markets. Visiting historical locations you've only previously encountered in books or online may top your list of priorities.

While these will likely be part of your overseas life, you will probably also find yourself surprised by situations you've never experienced or even imagined, such as language barriers, the surprises of typhoon season, gasoline rations, or the lack of amenities you may take for granted like central air.

While living overseas is absolutely an enriching and interesting experience, there will first be some practical matters to attend to, especially if you have a family. Since you're probably in a place of "I don't know enough to even know what to ask," your first line of help should be your overseas sponsor.

An **overseas sponsor** is a military member, usually from the same gaining unit, assigned and trained by the military through its Sponsorship Program to help an incoming military member with some of the culture shock of moving to an overseas location and settling in those first days. A good sponsor will be knowledgeable about the local area, available to answer questions, and help you with things like setting up lodging and initial transportation, and will usually meet the new family on their arrival in country.

While [the military handles training overseas sponsors](#), it may be helpful for you to know what to expect and even what questions you want answered, especially if this is your first time living overseas.

We all know that a military move affects the entire family. Add the overseas component and the stress of the transition is multiplied. The sponsor is usually the first contact military families have when arriving in country, and a good sponsor can be worth their weight in gold!



What Kind of Questions Should You Ask Your Overseas Sponsor?

- Info about local customs and especially the 'no-no's' that you might not realize. You don't want to start off your new assignment by inadvertently offending your future neighbors!
- Local must-sees, as well as high-crime or other areas to avoid.
- Some common phrases or questions to ask in the local language.
- What's considered polite/impolite.
- Travel and day trip resources.
- Help with determining your new housing area.
- Information about activities for kids: schools, childcare, sports, youth center programs, etc.
- How to navigate local transportation options.
- Any pet concerns and info about pet boarding.



While an overseas sponsor will assist the military member with the myriad tasks that go along with inprocessing to an overseas assignment, they can also help the military member and family with:

- information about possible spouse employment
- the availability of foreign language courses (many installations offer free training)
- contacts for the USO and MWR and other installation resources.

Check out these MBO articles for more information about overseas sponsors:

- [Checklist for an Overseas Sponsor](#)
- [What an Overseas Sponsor Meant to Our Military Family](#)

Did you know your kids can have a “sponsor” their own age?

Similar to the traditional sponsorship program designed for military members, the Youth Sponsorship Program was designed to give kids a chance to make a few decisions for themselves and investigate their new surroundings, all while meeting a potential new friend.

The youth or school services programs on each base typically handles registration and offers detailed information regarding exactly what is entailed with their YSP, as it varies from base to base. Learn more:

- [Ease the PCS Transition with the Youth Sponsorship Program](#)
- [Military Youth on the Move](#)

Don't forget to take a look at the receiving installation's website and social media for the most up-to-date information!

Pet Checklist for an International Move

If moving is stressful for those of us who've done it a few times, imagine the impact on our pets. To help make moving easier on your animals, whether it's an overseas or stateside PCS, preparation is key!

As soon as you receive orders, research the following information about your receiving location:

- Any required quarantines
- Microchip requirements
- Breed or species bans
- Base housing regulations regarding pets
- Arrangements for boarding if pet-friendly temporary lodging isn't available
- Paperwork you'll need to clear your pet from your current base or post



Flying with Your Pet

Most airlines have restrictions on pet travel during the summer months. Check with your specific airline to make arrangements if your pet will need to travel separately from you.

Others have arranged for [climate controlled cargo areas](#). If your pet will travel via air, begin crate training now, if you haven't already, to prepare for the trip (note that your crate will need to be airline-approved).

You may be eligible to fly your pet via [military transport](#).

To Sedate or Not?

It's not recommended to sedate your pet if they will be flying in the cargo hold of an airplane.

Check with your vet about recommendations for your situation, especially if your animal is easily stressed.

Pets can be stressed during a move and may not eat much.

Cats and dogs may respond to special treatment to help them eat, such as pouring broth over their food or extra treats.



Other recommendations for traveling with your pet:

- ✓ **Contact your veterinarian ASAP on receiving overseas orders.** You'll need to ensure that all vaccinations are up to date and get your pet a health certificate for overseas moves within 10 days of leaving the country, so book this appointment early. Using a military vet for required paperwork is ideal, as they are well versed in what's required. You'll also need to check in with the Veterinary Treatment Facility at your new base on arrival.
- ✓ **Update your pet's ID tag with current information.** It's also wise to take a photo of your pet(s) to keep on your phone.
- ✓ **Hand carry meds such as monthly heartworm pills and flea and tick medications.** And make sure the pet food isn't accidentally packed with your household goods!
- ✓ **You may wish to leave your pets with a trusted friend for the day or two that the movers are in the house.** It will likely be easier for both of you and reduce the likelihood that your pet could accidentally get out of the house through an open door.

A PCS with pets brings with it many considerations, so keep up with the most updated information and don't miss these MilitaryByOwner posts about moving with pets:

[Transporting Your Pet Overseas](#)
[OCONUS Moves with Your Pet](#)

Tips for

Moving Overseas with Pets



Traveling with Pets

Travel may stress your pet. While sedation isn't recommended for pets in flight, talk to your veterinarian before you travel to discuss coping strategies.

Airline Requirements

The airline may require you to purchase an approved crate, so check their guidelines before you buy.



Before the move, be sure to:



#1

Update vaccinations



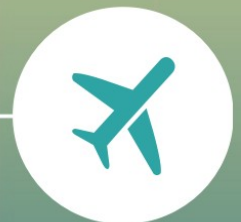
#2

Get pet's health certificate



#3

Update tag I.D. info



#4

Contact airline for requirements



You're almost there!

Other tips: Don't forget to update microchip information. Your sponsor may be able to help you with overseas pet boarding information. Check for any base housing restrictions or breed bans.

And remember, you'll be reunited soon!

Moving Overseas with Children

Most military kids have dealt with more change in their short lives than other people deal with over several decades: moves, deployments and separations from the active duty parent, and dealing with being the "new kid" over and over.

While we can't change the reality and likelihood of military relocation, there are a few things we can do to help our kids cope with the upheaval of moving, especially a big transition like moving overseas:

Research the new location. Go online or head to the library together to learn about the new country, language, foods, popular music, and local sports teams.

Prepare for travel. Make a travel 'wish list' together of all the places you'd like to visit. Mark a map with pushpins or a marker of all the places you'll go or landmarks you'd like to see.

Start learning the language. Take a class, get some phrase books, or use apps and recordings to learn a few key phrases before you arrive. Some kids enjoy having a small phrasebook of their own to use or a language app on their smartphone.

There's an app for that!

Duolingo: Learn languages for free with this fun app.

Smart Fish: Frequent Flyer:

Prepare your child for flying with this app that takes you through the steps of a flight and preparing for world travel.

Kids World Cultures:

Learn about different cultures—perhaps even the one you're going to!

Links are for info only and do not constitute endorsement.



Tips for Plane Travel with Little Ones

The airplane ride may bring anxiety to those who have small children and have yet to travel long distance. Preparation before the flight bodes far better than begging flight attendants for a deck of cards and peanuts.

- ✓ **In addition to readying the all-important electronic devices and stash of snacks**, run through the local dollar store for gifts to unwrap when the kids won't tolerate another episode of *My Little Pony*. No worries if these cheap toys are broken or left behind on the plane
- ✓ **If you have an infant, use the bassinet option some airlines offer.** The military may pay for the bassinet. It saves everyone a little sanity with baby safely in her own space.
- ✓ **Kids may need changes of clothes.** Pack those in a convenient location on board (preferably in zipper bags for reuse later) and add a comfy outfit for yourself, just in case the kids can't handle turbulence.
- ✓ **Stash packs of cleaning wipes** in the kids' bags, your purse, and any personal carry-on, in addition to the seat pockets. They clean kids, pulldown trays, and drink containers. For a cheap technique to protect strollers in transport, buy a twin size mattress cover and duct tape it securely around the stroller. If it survives, wash it and stow it for your trip home.

Learn about the new school. Find out where it's located and other information. Connecting your child with another youth through the Youth Sponsorship Program may help answer a lot of questions.

Make new friends but keep the old. Help your child make plans to stay in touch with old friends, whether it's through video chat, text, or old fashioned snail mail. Check out clubs and activities at the youth center and new school. Yours won't be the only new kid!

Track your trip! Encourage your child to record and share the new experiences they're having along the way, whether it's through selfies on social media or a simple journal or scrapbook.

Get ready for visitors! You may have lots of people wanting to visit you while you're living in another country. Ask your child to help make lists of favorite places to visit or sites to explore for when guests arrive.

Stay positive. Moving is difficult, and you must allow time for grief and goodbyes. Still, continue looking forward to all the new experiences awaiting and plan as a family!



Things will be hectic when you arrive in the new country, but make sure to take time for exploratory visits and fun moments. Bring school-aged children along to the newcomers' orientation (which often includes an installation tour) if you can.

Each child's temperament is different and will have a big impact on how the move affects them. If your child is struggling and you're not sure how to help them cope, there is free, confidential help available at [Military OneSource](https://www.militaryonesource.com).

Settling into Your New Home

The movers have gone and you're in your new home---or more likely, temporary lodging for a time. Since that usually means the beginning of a new school, neighborhood, and friends, remember that it takes time and patience to make your new house feel like a home and meet the people who are going to make this PCS memorable. Much of that will depend on where you decide to live.

On or off base housing? Each overseas installation will have differing availability and requirements for military housing, so be sure to submit an advance application for assignment (DD Form 1746) through the Housing Office at your losing installation with a complete copy of your PCS orders. Moving overseas will take additional planning and time.

If you choose to live off the installation, it's recommended to not make any commitments to a rental before checking in with your Housing Office. You may be entitled to an Overseas Housing Allowance (OHA), which varies depending on location, and offsets the cost of non-government housing.



Temporary Life

Since you'll be waiting longer for your HHG to arrive, you'll likely either be living in extended TLF or in your home with temporary loaner furniture.

While it may be difficult to feel "at home" without your own things, here are a few tips to get through that time:

- ✓ **Maintain a routine.** The military member will probably be back on duty long before you're settled in your new home. Try to maintain a normal routine for everyone else as much as you can for the comfort of familiarity.
- ✓ **Build in treats.** Life in temporary housing can quickly become mundane. Add an unexpected "treat" when you can.
- ✓ **Unpack what you need/stow the rest.** Corral what can become a tornadic TLF mess by hanging up clothes, utilizing the dressers and shelf space, and then stowing the luggage and anything else you won't be using immediately.

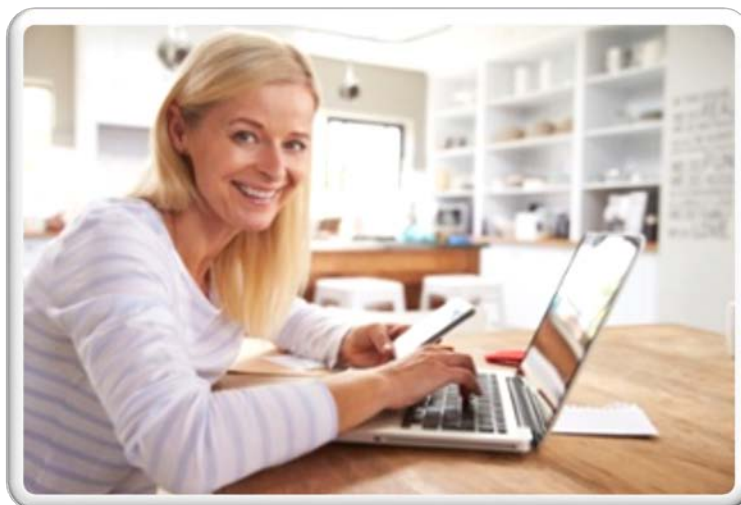
Military Spouse Employment Overseas

Finding employment during an overseas tour can be difficult. But with a willingness to think outside the box for these few years, you may be surprised!

Have patience. It can take some months to complete a transfer or find a new job.

Consider alternative options.

Take a look at the installation's website and consider defense contract work, civil service, NAF employment, or work at the commissary or AAFES.



Do something different. Perhaps this is your time to start a new career or your own business or go back to school. Living in a brand new environment may inspire you to take a new step! Volunteering may spark an interest in a new field or give you more experience to add to your resume'.

What about self-employment overseas?

While entrepreneurship offers portability and flexibility, there are some basic things you should know when starting a small business overseas. Make sure to check in with your installation's housing office to find out the rules about starting a home business at your installation. Then, according to Stephanie Brown of the Rosie Network, you'll need to do the following:

- ✓ **Written Request.** Submit a written request to the Installation Commander, Housing Director, MWR (service equivalent) and Exchange Director at least 30 days before beginning operations.
- ✓ **U.S. Taxes.** There may be a significant tax incentive if you register with the U.S.
- ✓ **Host Nation Taxes.** Each country is different. If you're required to pay host country taxes, you can receive a credit for the taxes paid when filing your U.S. taxes. This will eliminate the double tax burden. Your Housing Office has a list of resources.
- ✓ **What is Not Permitted.** The list may seem long and in some cases, unfair, but don't let that discourage you. Use common sense and educate yourself on what is and is not allowed at your installation and within your host nation.

For more information about spouse employment overseas, see [Real Help for Self-Employed Military Spouses Overseas](#) and visit [The Rosie Network](#).

Life in Another Culture: An Experience Like No Other!

Now that all the logistics of moving are behind you, it's good to remember that, from the moment your feet touch the ground, you're living a dream.

Make time to learn the language--at the least simple phrases for greetings and ordering food, sample local fare, learn local customs and really experience life overseas. Many people only dream of travel—you're living it!

Hopefully, you'll make time to:

Celebrate differences. There's a lot to learn from our friends around the globe. Some lessons they may teach you: not always being in a hurry, the importance of rest, respecting elders.

Try new food. Some of our staffers' favorites: brotchen, schnitzel, lumpia, Riesling wine, Kalua pork, pancit, pho. Be adventurous!

If you're on a tropical island or "glamorous" location in Europe, your friends and family back home may not have much sympathy if you're feeling down or homesick.

While it's an amazing experience to live overseas, it can also be exhausting in some ways. If you don't know the language well, you may miss making small talk and feel stupid and left out at times (and you'll have a new appreciation for those who can speak more than one language!).

From dealing with obscure local ordinances to navigating a healthcare system while ill, even little tasks can turn into big chores by the time you get through the language and cultural barriers, never mind if you have an extended family emergency. If you need to take a break from it all and binge watch Netflix or make a long Skype call back home, give yourself permission!



Author Credits



Jen McDonald is the Content Editor for MilitaryByOwner Advertising. She's the author of the book *You Are Not Alone: Encouragement for the Heart of a Military Spouse*, and has been published in several books and numerous national publications. She's been "married to the military" for 25+ years, and is the mom of four, including one son in the military. She and her Air Force husband have been stationed all around the world from Europe to the Pacific and won't count how many houses they've lived in because that would be too depressing. She regularly writes about military life, parenting, and homeschooling. See more from Jen at [Jen McDonald](#).



Mary Ann Eckberg, originally from Nebraska, is a writer, a dreamer, an animal rescue softie, a laundry ninja, a football fanatic, and a cupcake connoisseur. Honored to be a military spouse, Mary Ann collects good friends and good memories at every assignment. Follow her adventures with blog posts at [MilitaryByOwner's blog](#).



Karina Gafford, originally from Ireland, has been a proud U.S. citizen since 2010. She and her husband have lived together in Florida, South Carolina, Virginia, and Texas. Karina is a Realtor with Keller Williams City View in San Antonio, a founder of Tutors By Base, and an active member in her military spouse community. She has served on many military spouse committees, and is currently the co-chapter leader of the MilSpo Project in San Antonio, a non-profit that supports military spouse business owners and entrepreneurs.



Danielle Keech has been married to her Marine for 3 years. During her short time of involvement with the military, she's learned the importance of flexibility, like most military spouses! With dinners spoiled due to late arrivals, watching weekend plans dissolve into nothing, and struggling to decide a career path, she's just like you. Danielle enjoys writing about military spouse and family issues. She hopes to help other spouses in similar situations while creating a dialogue so that she can learn from you, as well.



Dawn Smith is a mom to one daughter and has been married to her husband and the Army for 17 years. Not surprisingly, she has a recurring case of wanderlust and is known to report on her travels frequently. She is a writer during the day with a serious habit of HGTV/House Hunters viewing at night. Dawn is pleased to share her experiences with MilitaryByOwner and others hoping to simplify family journeys of all kinds. Find Dawn at [LinkedIn](#).

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