

## Transcript

**Episode Title: "Moving Abroad with a Family & Having a Baby Abroad" with DEANNA**

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**DEANNA** [00:00:00]

Got amazing service in Hong Kong, giving birth to my child with extra medications like strep B and an epidural. And the whole nine and I paid a fraction, I paid it, I paid it on my octopus card. It's a little card that we use to get on the train and to open our apartments and stuff because it has RFID. I paid for my hospital stay. So four days in the hospital on my octopus card.

**CHRISTINE** [00:00:29]

Hey, everyone, welcome back to *Flourish in the Foreign* the podcast that elevates and affirms the voices, and the stories of Black women living and thriving abroad. Because you know what? We do this. I'm your host, CHRISTINE. And I am so happy that you are here. I just want to thank you all so, so much for your amazing, incredible support of the podcast and the launch of the podcast last week. Thank you, you guys really came through. So I appreciate that. Before I get to the next story, I do want to let you know all the ways you can support this podcast. So the *Flourish in the Foreign* podcast is written, posted and crafted, and lovingly edited by me, Christine, and this process is a labor of love but labor nonetheless. And because podcasting is not free. It takes time, money and resources to produce this show for you, which I lovingly do. And I'm so excited to share more and more episodes with y'all. However, that is why I request support from you all if you are digging this show, I would love for you to support the show. There are two ways for you to support the show. One is monetary The other is non monetary and both are equally appreciated. The monetary way is through the site Patreon, you can find the podcast Patreon page at [patreon.com/flourishforeign](https://patreon.com/flourishforeign). So that is [patreon.com/flourishforeign](https://patreon.com/flourishforeign), which allows you to contribute to the show monthly. So it works like this on the first of the month. Patreon automatically takes out whatever you choose to donate ranging from one euro to as many years as you like. And based on the level of your support is the level of content that you receive from me. So that includes community access. That includes bonus episodes, and behind the same content, and even live q&a sessions with some of our podcast guests. And if you choose to support the podcast through Patreon, I will love you forever. And also I will shout you out here on this podcast. So thank you, thank you, thank you in advance. Now for the non monetary way to support the podcast which is equally as important. Please shout out the podcast on social media. You can tag the podcast across Instagram and Twitter and Facebook at *Flourish in the Foreign*. Let people know what you think about the podcast and why you like it. Please rate the show five stars on Apple podcasts, leave a review. Of course subscribe to the podcast, so that when new episodes come out, they just drop magically into your listening device. This next story is of Deanna who is from Atlanta, and moved her family to Hong Kong. Moving abroad comes with a whole host of issues, logistical issues, perhaps financial or

professional, cultural, and those issues are somewhat magnified when you are moving not only yourself, but a husband and a small child. I let Deana tell you how she managed it. Let's start at the very beginning.

**DEANNA** [00:04:17]

I was born in Albany, New York. So upstate New York, and then I moved to Atlanta when I was about 11. And so I did most of my middle school, high school and college in Atlanta. So in high school, I was obsessed with anime, Japanese animation. And so I had always wanted to visit Japan, live in Japan, or do something like that. I took French for like seven years. I was like yeah, I'm gonna live in Paris one day. And so like a general idea of maybe living outside of the US was always a thing, but didn't seem like a real tangible, you know, goal that I could reach one day, it didn't seem realistic for me because I just didn't. I didn't have anybody in my family that really traveled or lived abroad outside of the Caribbean. My mom is Jamaican, my family's Jamaican. And so I like I'm, I'm first generation in the States, but outside of just going back and forth from some Island, we really didn't travel like that. And no one really lived abroad like that. So it didn't seem like a real thing, if that makes sense. It was more like maybe one day I could study abroad, if I'm lucky, or something like that. It never seemed like a feasible thing. But then me and Dave got married. And we put it on our bucket list that like, Oh, yeah, one of our goals should be living, you know, outside the country and making a big move. My husband has been working for college in Atlanta. And they have a campus in Hong Kong. He works in the admissions department, because he works for this college, and they have a campus in Hong Kong, we went to visit. At one point, we stayed about 10 days. And we took our daughter, she was 15 months at the time. And so we just went as a family with the school to go visit. And we fell in love with the place. You know, the transportation was really convenient and clean. And the malls are really nice. And the hotel was gorgeous. So we're like, oh, yeah, one day, we definitely have to live there. Yeah, we definitely have to do that. And so then maybe six months later, a position opens up there in the admissions department. And so he applied for an MBA promotion. So he applied for the promotion. And yeah, he got it. And so we were like, Oh, my God really doing this, we are moving on to the other side of the world. Basically, our first visa was for two years. And so that was kind of the timeframe that we got, like, it's only two years, it'll be okay. It's, you know, it's only two years. But we are really excited and really gung ho about it. So while my family was supportive, I think they did count it kind of as a loss. So it was, it was mixed, so like the outside world to like, the social media and oh my god, my mom's gonna kill me for saying this. But I'm like, to her friends or whatever she's really excited about, you know, her daughter that's going to go live in China, blah, blah, blah. It's a whole thing. But like to me, and you know, with the family, it was like, are you sure you want to do this? You know, I can't believe you're leaving, you know, are you so young? That's my daughter. Are you so young, you know, she's not gonna remember us, she's not gonna know us. You know, you're gonna be all alone. You don't even know anybody there, which is all fair statements and really valid feelings. But it was just something that meant, you know, the family that I was building really wanted to do. They were supportive. But it was really hard. The company that my husband was working for, they gave us a movie package, but it wasn't very robust. It definitely is. Now upon like, reflection definitely wasn't a very good expat package that includes housing and moving fees and movers and blah, blah, they kind of gave us a flat rate and said Good luck. But Hong Kong,

we knew from research, is really small and compact, so you don't have as much area in your apartment. You definitely rarely have a house unless you live on the outskirts. And so we were coming from a two bedroom townhouse down to Lake, I think, I think our first apartment was rather large for Hong Kong. So it's about 800 square feet or so for three bedrooms. But we just moving our stuff was gonna be stupid, expensive, and to be honest, is mostly IKEA stuff. Anyway, it wasn't worth it to like, pack everything and hire movers to get it across the world. We pretty much tried to sell or give away everything that we had. I think the hardest part about that was I was working for a fashion company for kids. And so I had a crap ton of baby clothes and kids clothes for my daughter stuff that she hadn't even worn yet. But I just had, like, ready to go, you know, some brand new items because I need to get it at a discount or get it from a sample sale or whatever. And so I had so many beautiful clothes, and like, sold them off at like \$1 a piece. And then an acquaintance from college was having a child, a daughter and her boyfriend had just left and like I gave her a crap ton of things. I was like, hey, do you have this crib? Okay, this crib is yours. When a bookcase here's a bookcase and here are the kid's clothes and here just take everything. So it was the easiest thing to get rid of. But so yeah, we pretty much just either sold or gave away everything that we had, that our visas got delayed so that we were pretty much homeless and waiting for our visas to come through with no flights and no promises. So we're at my mom's apartment, which is three bedrooms with my little brother my daughter and my husband, and my mom. Then finally they were ready and we just left and got on the plane, it was awesome.

**CHRISTINE** [00:10:13]

After having a super nice flight, she and her family landed in Hong Kong, the night started a little rocky, they had no idea, they would be indicative of how the next couple of days would go,

**DEANNA** [00:10:30]

we brought our daughter's super large American size stroller with us. And it had that car seat attachment. And we forgot the car seat attachment on like the conveyor belt for baggage claim. And once you go through security and stuff you can't turn around, there's no turning around going back to baggage claim. And so we spent like half the night trying to get SIM cards for our cell phones, which are cell phones over so that we can call the right numbers to figure out who in the airport we talk to to get the stupid Carsey thing. And then we're also staying in an Airbnb to start earlier as opposed to staying in Airbnb to start, which we had already booked before. And finally, I got my phone to work. So we're trying to call the guy for the Airbnb, but nobody's answering, because it's the middle of the night. It's like 2 am. And so we find the address, give it to the taxi driver, he can't find the place. He drops us off with all of our luggage like we have huge things of luggage because of course we're moving. So we have these huge things: luggage plus the baby plus a giant stroller and car seat trying to figure out how to get to this Airbnb. The taxi driver drops us off in the back of an alley, and it was just stairs going up. And we're like, where are we even supposed to go? And so we're trying to contact the host for Airbnb. There's no answer there. So we contacted Airbnb itself. And they're like, Oh, well, can you just go to a cafe or something while we try to get a hold of them? And we're like, it's three in the morning. And we're in Hong Kong? No, there's no Cafe open. They're like, Oh, shoot, right? Okay, so they pay for us to stay at a hotel. And so but all the way to the hotel, we ended up

finding the place for the Airbnb, but then we couldn't find the stupid key. But it was some kind of like, mysterious maze thing to try to find the stupid key. So we gave up on that and ended up taking them to the hotel. And that was nice. But then we couldn't figure out how to turn the lights on. It was just one thing after another. This was our first night, it was rough. And then finally, the concierge guy told us how to turn on the lights, all you do is of course stick your key card in the slot and the lights come on, which we hadn't really seen a video tell. So we didn't know. And so we were in the dark for a while literally. But because of the visa delays, my husband had to start work immediately on Monday. And we didn't land until Sunday. So the next day, he had to go to work. And I was alone with the baby. I had one friend from college that I knew lived in Hong Kong. And so she was kind of trying to help and she had to work on it. So she told me about this, this Hong Kong mommies group on Facebook that everyone was a part of at one point. In the first couple of days, maybe the first or second day, I was in tears alone in the hotel room with Aria and I'm just like, I don't know what to do. My daughter is super hyper. She wants to play because she's almost two. So she wants to play and I don't know what to do. And I feel like I don't even know how to be a mom right now. And so I put that on the Facebook group. So many women reached out to say, I'm sorry, you're going through this, you know, if you need a play day, let me know we can meet up today, we can do this right now. And so I made some friends from there. And then this music Learning Center reached out and was Hey, we're actually located in your same area, please come over right now at no charge, just, you know, let her run off her energy, whatever. And so I'm also in terrible directions. So I got lost for like an hour, the places maybe 15 minutes away walking, maybe 10 now that I know where I am, but I got lost for like an hour trying to find it. And when I finally got there, you know, they gave us snacks and just grew up to talk to Aria and got to play in the play place. It was amazing. And like, it was just such a relief to talk to other people. And like the owner was super sweet and had the most beautiful voice and so she was singing like frozen to my daughter. And it was just like, oh my god, it just made it bearable. But yeah, that first few days it was rough. We had no place to live here. So living out of a hotel was hectic and crazy. And it was a lot. It was a lot but actually, I don't have anything there now. It was just a long period.

**CHRISTINE** [00:14:40]

Deanna is a fellow Black woman podcaster her podcast is called loose change. The second episode of her podcast carrying the burden of my race caught my attention. It was a provocative title, but also the substance of it was quite painfully relatable.

**DEANNA** [00:15:02]

I was in Vietnam. And I had gotten a weird dm from my old French teacher in Atlanta, about my hashtags they use, because I use Black girl magic Black girls travel to Black and abroad, you know, all the Black girl hashtags, because representation matters. And like a lot like your podcast, I want to show what we are capable of. And it's easier to believe you could be there if you see it. And so of course, I use these hashtags. Now, this Italian white woman did not agree with this notion, and decided to tell me all about how she didn't agree. And she thought I was so much better than that, and so much more intelligent than that, and felt that I should be wanting to inspire all girls, or all people, rather than just Black people. And she just didn't see the necessity of blah, blah, blah. This was on mother frickin Christmas, by the way, while I'm on

vacation with my family in Vietnam. And I'm just like, this woman had the audacity to just put herself out there like that, like she felt so free. And it made me so angry for so long, like days and days, I went on thinking about this. And it made me reflect on just why didn't I just tell her about herself? Because like, in my responses, I was courteous, you know, I was trying to be very gracious and understanding and come with facts and educate her. And then I was trying to think, why did I feel the need to educate this stupid ignorant lady who thought she had a right to me because I was in her friend's class for a few years. What even is that and it's just, and then I thought about a meetup that we had had with other Black women, where the women that were there said that no matter where she goes, she carries herself a certain way because she knows that she is the representation of all Black women. So if this is their first experience with a Black woman, she wants to make sure that they have the right experience of who we are. And there's just such a heavy burden with that to always have to be a certain way. Because of how people perceive us. And I talked about that in therapy. Because it was just like, I felt so crushed by it. Like, by that heavy burden, I don't, I'm not a perfect person, I make so many mistakes. And I put so much pressure on myself to be like the best version of myself possible. And I was so worried that I'm going to make a bad impression on Black people, a bad impression on Black women, and a bad impression on Black moms. And like, because especially when you're like, you're a multi intersectional person, you represent a lot of different people. And it's just, that's too much, it's too much. And I don't want to do that anymore. And so like, I had started sharing actively with white people, especially how that feels, and just be more open about like, like, if some person just asked me, you know, at work on Tuesdays, we have like a morning meeting with the entire staff and some parts, they just tell you to like chat with the person next to you find out how their weekend was going. And I think that had just happened to me. And so I had made a point to tell the white woman that I was talking with how that made me feel of trying to carry this burden of my race on my shoulders. And it was something so freeing, and telling a white person that that's how other white people make me feel. And how other Black women can make me feel. We are not a monolith, we are not all the same. And how I now do not mean that all Black women are like me, or how I am now is not an exception to how Black people are. And I feel like that's a very unique stress to people of color, especially to women of color who tend to get the short end of the stick and kind of many, many, many respects. So yeah, so that episode came from that. And it was very therapeutic to just get it out. And then after therapy actually during therapy, my therapist told me to block the woman on Facebook, which I did know, I blocked her on Instagram, I kept her on Facebook so she can see what she's messing with, but she can't respond to anything, which is petty, but also I need that. And I keep using my hashtags. And I keep you know, speaking from a perspective of me as a Black woman as a Black mom as a Black podcaster as a Black designer as a Black woman living in another country. I think what's been really, really motivating though is that I have had non Black people like white and Chinese people say oh, I listened to this episode and it was just really inspiring to me and I really just saw myself in it and I'm like that is so good for you. I am so glad for you. It wasn't for you. And I don't have to tell them that it wasn't for you. But I'm glad that they don't feel that way because I specifically mentioned Black people. me as a Black person. I felt like this because I am And this is what that means for me but that they couldn't get something from that I want my audience to be other Black women, other Black girls, other Black people, and if another person, another

culture and can glean something from that, too. That's fantastic. But my priority right now is Blackness. And there's no shame in that.

**CHRISTINE** [00:20:19]

Finding community is essential to feeling comfortable and feeling at home in a place. Discovering if they are other Black people in a city is heartwarming, or at least somewhat reassuring at times. But what is fascinating is that moving abroad will put you into social circles with maybe Black people that you would have never have considered before.

**DEANNA** [00:20:53]

The only common denominator is that you both are ex-pats, in the same city, there is a Facebook group called sisters in Hong Kong. And that's all Black women from all over the world. And it's a few 100 people. And it's really supportive. And so once a month, we would meet up together with all the Black women and just have dinner and talk and wine and whatever, it was great to see the different types of Black people that were there. And then also the different classes of Black people. Because there were women in that group that were big business owners in Hong Kong, that worked for the console, it worked for the government, some work, we were working in finance, there were just so many different types of Black women, especially in those groups, that it was just like it was just amazing to see. And so it makes you feel closer in proximity to them if that makes sense. And so here we are all at the same dinner table, you know, discussing our lives or whatever and just chatting it up, or at a Christmas party and just chatting it up. And it's like, it makes you feel like you're just one step away from that if that makes sense. Like you're just one step away from greatness or one step away from becoming whoever you want to be a card I just made it feel like there are definitely more possibilities for me as a Black woman here in Hong Kong.

**CHRISTINE** [00:22:14]

And I kind of leaned into that access to haircare and skincare is vital. deciding if you are going to be shipping in your most beloved products bringing your current favorites and an extra piece of luggage or trying out the local products are crucial decisions. Because Ain't nobody got time to look at your crazy and any streets.

**DEANNA** [00:22:37]

Haircare products are an issue. When we first got here, Amazon did not ship here that often, which was just ridiculous before the virus hit, they opened it up a lot more. And so a lot, a lot more vendors actually started shipping here. So it was a bit more possible plus the four came. So that opened the door to a lot of things. But before that man, I had to get care packages from the States. Before I came, one of the boxes I did ship here was just full of hair care products, duplicates, and triplicates of incorrigible kits of the same product, so that I and my daughter wouldn't run out. I have a lot of hair and I have four seat girls and my daughter has a lot of hair and she has 40 girls. And so it's serious plus the humidity here is off the charts. So like I can't even do a twist out here. Because my hair curls up in I think less than an hour if I'm outside if like by the time I can get to the bus stop my hair is gone. I also found a lady that braids hair here. She comes to my house Victoria and she's amazing. And the price is comparable to the

states. It's one of those things you don't realize how much you need it until you have someone else's hands in your head again, and they're parting it they're racing your scalp, they're putting down gel, you know, they're they're corn, rolling it like it's, I didn't realize how much I missed that until I had her hands in my hair. So now she comes over maybe every month to braid my hair.

**CHRISTINE** [00:24:03]

In some parts of the world. Having a child is not only a glorious event, but an expensive one as well. Tina and her husband had had their first child in Atlanta and their second child in Hong Kong. And although the experiences are relatively similar, and the results of happy, healthy children were the same. The cost was drastically different.

**DEANNA** [00:24:30]

I got pregnant the first time and I was 2003 in 23 right after I got married. We ended up getting pregnant which was not part of the plan. So yeah, we got pregnant, and we were like, well, I guess we're just gonna be parents. Now. My pregnancy with Aria was sucky. It was awful. I had morning sickness for maybe seven months. So starting from like the moment I found out I was pregnant for about seven months straight. I had morning sickness thrown up all over the place. I mean, while losing weight like crazy, and so I can't like, physically, my body's not holding up very well. And so, you know, I'm still going to work every day, I'm still working full time, I have a lot of support from friends and family. And I gave birth at Northside Hospital in Atlanta. And it's like, it's called, like the baby factory, because it's the most beautiful facility to give birth in. And it's like, you get your own private room. It's huge. My husband was there the whole time. I got my epidural, but I was in labor for like, 26 hours, which again, not ideal, but yeah, it was, that was awful. And then I went home and you know, as most mothers will do, but not tell you about me crying in the middle of the night, because I can't breastfeed properly and my daughter will go to sleep because she's hungry, or she's sleeping too much because she's hungry. It was really, really rough. And that was with having a support system around me. And then it cost me like, eight grand with insurance, because of America. So like even having corporate health insurance, it still cost us about \$8,000 to give birth to Aria. And then my second child, Malia, I had her in Hong Kong, the same wave of morning sickness, fantastic. But this time, I had it for all nine months, which is just wonderful. So with the Lia, you know, for transportation, we don't have a car here. Everything we do is usually public transportation, or we're walking or something. So it was still a lot of walking, which was odd for me because you know, I'm getting bigger and I'm nauseous, but I have to walk and take buses everywhere. So I started fainting everywhere and fainted on the way home from work on a bus. I think twice. I fainted on the train twice. I fainted at work once. I fainted at home a few times, I think the first time I fainted at work, my co-workers were like no, you have to go to the hospital. And I'm like, Well, I don't want to go to the hospital. I don't know, like, you know, if I can afford the hospital cuz I had never been to the hospital before. You know, like, cuz even in the States, I would think I can't afford the ambulance. Right? It's a \$500 taxi. Right? Why would I do that? But here, it's like, why would you not go? Of course, go to the hospital. Why would you not? And like the doctors would look at me and they're staying overnight, right? Like, why would you leave, it's going to cost you nothing. And so we look at the bill when we're done, you know, after taking the doctor's advice, and you look at the bill, and it's a few 100 Hong Kong dollars, and you're like, Oh, that's it. It's

nothing. It's my lunch money for the week, if that, you know, it's one meal, my prenatal care was great. I was with some great midwives. And it was covered by my insurance, I think like 80%, which was great. And then for the birth, I ended up going public because we have a free public health care system here as long as you have a Hong Kong ID. So I was able to use the public system. And it's based on your location. So I didn't get to choose my hospital per se. But so I just went to the closest one that had the facilities for it. And so, fortunately, because I'm fainting and having a terrible pregnancy, already I am, I was in the hospital, maybe two or three times before I gave birth. So I got to kind of see what the hospital was gonna be like anyway because it's public, you're in the same room with maybe five, like five people on each row. So like 10 other people in each room. And it's, it's sectioned off by curtains. And so there's, you know, your other women moaning and groaning, but also at the age of technology. So everyone knows the headphones, you're enjoying your media or reading books or doing whatever. So the hospital was pretty nice. The food was gross, but it's hospital food. And my midwives weren't allowed to be there because they didn't have you know, they don't have privileges at the public hospitals. But they had a class about giving birth in a public hospital, which was fantastic. A roomful of nurses and one doctor, who was super sweet, spoke English well. So that was reassuring, because I'm just like, I don't know how to explain to you in Cantonese that I'm miserable right now. But yeah, they were just super supportive. Somalia came out and she was the same way as Aria a little shorter. And then I stayed in the hospital for like three days. They gave me postnatal classes like how to breastfeed again and doing physical therapy like pelvic floor exercises and stretching and stuff like that. They had free classes for that available and so I took a few of those and some of them were in the middle of the night, which is great because, you know, you try to sleep in the baby sleeps, but the baby sleeps whenever they feel like it and so they like run these classes in the middle of the night sometimes, which is great because there are moms that are awake and we're doing it anyway, I got amazing service in Hong Kong, giving birth to my child with like extra medications for like strep B and an epidural, and the whole nine and I paid a fraction I pay I paid it on my octopus card. It's like a little card that we used to get on the train and to open our apartments and stuff because it has RFID. I paid for my hospital stay. So four days in the hospital on my octopus card. And they also gave me vitamins and stuff to take home with me all included. And so it just doesn't make sense to me, why the state has to cost so much when it's like everyone else has the same equipment, and is doing it. And it's subsidized by the government. And it's, you know, it's covered and you pay like a menial fee. It made me realize that like in the states that, you know, we really boast about our high level of service. And you know, we're number one and this and this and this and that's why it costs so much and it has to cost this much and blah, blah, blah. It was a really eye opening experience of being a bit more disenchanted with the states.

**CHRISTINE** [00:30:50]

A popular reason for people to move abroad is the cost of living. You can have a better cost of living in your new home than in your hometown. Perhaps the cost of transport or travel is significantly cheaper. Or perhaps housing is significantly cheaper. That is not the case. In Hong Kong.

**DEANNA** [00:31:14]



Hong Kong is so expensive for real estate, think like New York prices and New York sighs. Our first flat was maybe 800 square feet, which is really large for Hong Kong, especially for the area that we were in. And we had worked with a real estate agent for renting. That's what everyone does. When you rent, you work with an agent. Their fees are 50% of whatever the rent was that you agreed upon. And then your landlords will also be working with a separate real estate agent. Between the two agents, they figure out all the details and stuff. And so our real estate agent found some great flats in the first or second week that we got to Hong Kong, she showed us a bunch of places based on where David was going to be working access to public transportation, so buses, trains, minibusses, great stuff, just the size that she got us was really big. So for 800 square feet, three bedrooms, two full bathrooms was also having a full bathroom here. Like rarely, but it's amazing. We paid about \$3,000 a month, 3000 US dollars a month, I had just switched jobs, I just found out I was pregnant, we were trying to get into school, and then our landlord raised our rent by \$1,000. So we had to find a new place to live, which we ended up doing but with that that was even that was a blessing. Because of the new place, we found the area is a lot quieter. The school's options were much better. And our flats are a little smaller. It's around 600 something square feet now, but it costs us 2400 a month. So we save quite a bit. But still three bedrooms, two baths, so it's a good place.

**CHRISTINE** [00:32:56]

Deanna and her family have been living in Hong Kong for the past four years. So I asked her who was Chinese.

**DEANNA** [00:33:04]

In Hong Kong, they speak Cantonese. In Mainland China, they speak Mandarin. For the most part, though, everybody here speaks Cantonese in English and then some Mandarin, which is a big contrast from the States because regularly most people here are bilingual. In the States, you're lucky if you speak English that well. So that was hard to kind of grapple with. So I and my husband and tried to speak Cantonese lessons, I know my numbers, I know how to ask the bus to stop. I know how to say turn left and turn right. But I don't know which one is which. I just know both terms. And I know how to order mango juice. And that's probably the extent of my Cantonese Oh, I know how to say excuse me, and thank you, but only because those are very similar words. My daughter is learning Mandarin in school. And so her Mandarin is pretty decent. And then I have coworkers that love my daughter. And so they help her with her Mandarin homework or just talk to her in Mandarin when we get together so that she's keeping up with the language. And then my youngest daughter, Malia, is learning Tagalog, which is the Filipino language because my helper is Filipino. And because Malia is a baby, it's gonna do really amazing things for her to learn two languages at once, you know, at this age, and then when she starts school, she'll learn Mandarin too. So Millie will probably be trilingual. About time. This is all said and done. But for the most part, people speak English here. So it's relatively easy to get around. But when I started, oh, man, it was rough. Like, I'd have to have friends record something on WhatsApp and send it to me so that I could play it for whoever I was trying to talk to. Or I would get on Google Translate and hope for the best. But also now because I know my numbers and whatnot if I'm in meetings, and then all of a sudden they start speaking Cantonese like I know my days of the week, which are also based on numbers. So I

like to use context clues to the kind of get a sense of what they're saying. Because it is a little bit rude Loki to kind of speak if you're in a meeting to speak languages that not everybody understands. And they do that if they want to kind of keep me out of the conversation. And it's not really with malice or anything, it's more like, I just need, like, I need to get something passed real quick. So it is fun to follow up on their questions in English like, Oh, no, I think that date is good. And they're like, Oh, you speak Cantonese? And like, No, not really. Or I'll just like, just a little bit here and there. That happened recently. So that's been funny, knowing some Cantonese is helpful. But it's not a requirement.

**CHRISTINE** [00:35:43]

I always ask my guests, at which point they feel settled in a new country in a new city. And at what point it felt almost like home or just comfortably familiar.

**DEANNA** [00:35:57]

I don't think I felt settled until the second year. And I had heard that a lot from people moving to Hong Kong, because Hong Kong is a transient city, people come, people go a lot. And I heard from a lot of people that you're not going to feel settled, or as you belong here for two years, like the loneliness won't pass until two years in and I'm like, Oh, no, what? That's crazy. Two years is a long time. And sure enough, yeah, two years, it took me to get my bearings, feel like I'm a part of something, and make really good friends. And I'm like, really extroverted social person. So that loneliness hit hard. And it was hard to talk about with my family. Because, you know, I had been so gung ho about coming, even though I didn't know what I was in for. But it was just like, I feel so alone here. How do I tell them I'm not doing well? And like the first three months, I had no job. And because of our student loans, because America, we could not afford to live on one income. Even though Dave was making more money here, I need to get a job. And I was doing freelance graphic design for like three months and applying everywhere. But also they don't do daycare here. Everyone has a nanny like it's called a domestic helper that lives with you. And so I couldn't interview for jobs because I had no one to care for my child. And I couldn't hire a nanny or anything, because I couldn't afford one. After all, I have no job. And I need to get a job to do that. So it was a stressful time. And so we finally got to help her. Maybe after the first month or two, and she's amazing. She still lives with us. Her name is Mary. And so she would start to watch Aria while I would try to go for job interviews, but no one was hiring me. Because I was very American. But to the point where, like, there were certain things like how to set up the resume for here, how to format it, even what size it needs to be or what to say, it was foreign to me, no pun intended. But it was foreign to me. I didn't know how, if not for lack of trying. And so I just wasn't getting job offers, I was getting a bunch of freelance stuff, but not a lot of job offers. And so there was a point where my husband's like, Look, either we find a job for you in the next month, or we have to probably go back home because we can't afford it. And so at that point, I was also freelancing for that music Learning Center that I had visited the first week that we had gotten there, just doing some marketing stuff. And I was like, hey, do you guys have a permanent position open or anything? Are you hiring? And the owner was like, actually, yeah, we're opening a new center. And we were looking for someone to do marketing. And so I was like, oh, shoot, yeah, me right there. And so that week, I interviewed them just to have a conversation about what that would look like. And they hired me. And then I negotiated the

salary. And yeah, and I just prayed on it. And I prayed on it. And I prayed on it. And I was like, Look, God, I can't have a low salary here, cuz, well, relatively low. I just knew how much we needed to survive. And so that's what I prayed on and asked for. And when I went into the interview, that's how much I asked to be paid. And they were like, No, we can't afford that. So no. Then I told them, Okay, well just come up with some kind of creative compensation. And, you know, I'm sure you guys can figure it out. And by lunchtime, they're like, Okay, never mind, yeah, we'll just give you that salary. It's fine. So I ended up with a beautiful apartment that, you know, we could just barely afford. We had an amazing helper to live with us and take care of our daughter. And then I got a job that I liked. And because it was a Learning Center, my daughter could also go to work with me on some days, and she got to take free classes there. So it is just for all those things that worked out for us. I still didn't quite feel settled there until maybe two years and I think the job was really hard and just wasn't what I thought it was gonna be. I just didn't know how to keep up with friendships very well. Because you know, it's, culturally it's different, right. And so I think back home all my friends were mostly from college. And so we had kind of our routine you go over, you just hang out or whatever. But here the flats are all really small. And so people don't hang out at the house like that, like Not really. And you know, they're going out to bars or clubs or whatever. And I just, that wasn't where I was at. And so I just didn't know how to maintain friendships really, or how to, like ask them when to go out or whatever. And so I was just, I was lonely for the first two years. I think getting new friends, leaving that old job for something different, still doing design, and making new friends. And then I think after I had my second kid, that's, I think that's when I started to feel like, Okay, this is my home now. Like, this is where we live. And I think that's also around the time when our visa was running out. And we're talking about reapplying? Do we want to stay? Do we want to renew our visas? My daughter started school. And so I had mom friends that were around her age, and like to start going to birthday parties and stuff for them. I felt like part, I think, yeah, I think when I felt part of a community, that's when I started to feel like okay, this is where I should live. This is home now. And I think the same for my husband like when he started getting into the community with the dads and he found other Black dads in Hong Kong. I think something shifted for both of us kind of simultaneously. We're like, yeah, this is our home now. I mean, plus I got pregnant and it was like over we can't move on pregnant cuz not doing that. So yeah, I think that's what it all just kind of clicked in place, I felt like I belonged. It was great. So definitely before Corona's head, we were definitely kind of settled with being here for at least seven years, so that we can get permanent residency. And that way, we wouldn't need a visa for jobs here, if we stay for seven years and then apply. And since we're already at four, that doesn't seem so far off, I would love to stay in Hong Kong. But then the virus hit and then we considered Do we need to move back to the States because it was looking like things might get bad here because we are attached to China. But even with the virus, we got affected, but we barely hit over 1000 cases even after our big spike. And we've had it since January. And so like I mean part of that's because everyone wears masks here. It's part of that because we do have a free health care system. So you can get a test if you need a test. And with the WhatsApp groups, everybody knows who's got it and who doesn't. And if it's in the building where you're living, and if you're supposed to be in quarantine, they give you a bracelet to wear. So culturally, people will shame you. If you are, you have a quarantine bracelet on. I mean, they'll shame me if you don't wear a mask, it's that bad. But especially if you're supposed to be in quarantine because you have the

virus, people will chase you down. So all that to say we had considered for a second moving back if we have to move back. But really, we don't want to be like we even got an offer for my husband's job to move back. But we turned it down. Because we like being here. We like the people that we found here. I like my job. You know, I like the opportunities we have. And I started a podcast here. And you know, my job is helping you with that, like giving you a microphone to use. And you know, my daughter is going to an international school where she's learning another language from the age of five, which is amazing for her. And you know, and now even with being working from home and having just homeschooling, she has online classes right now. And it's a full curriculum every single day. And it's tedious, and it's so much freaking work. But I'm also really grateful that her teacher is available all day checking the work, working with the students, and having meetups for the kids, so they all can see each other.

**DEANNA** [00:44:09]

And I just see so much potential for our lives here. And I've just grown so much in the four years that I've been here that I just, I can't picture myself being back in the States right now I don't picture those opportunities being the same, you know, on top of, I mean, plus, I have a helper here, so I don't clean ever anymore. And honestly, that might have been the cause of my divorce if... if we had stayed in the States.

**DEANNA** [00:44:36]

So I mean, even my marriage is flourishing because of Hong Kong. And I just, I'm not ready to let that go. There are so many more possibilities for me here and for my family to grow and thrive. There's less holding us back in Asia than there is in the States. And it just seems strange and counterintuitive. versus kind of how we feel

**CHRISTINE** [00:45:02]

A topic that is not as popular when talking about moving abroad is taxes. Yes, taxes, follow you everywhere, especially if you're an American, most people do not consider tax implications, perhaps their pensions, or other bureaucratic systems before they move abroad. And it can be a little overwhelming. Or it can be a pleasant surprise,

**DEANNA** [00:45:28]

There are a lot of benefits to living here like our taxes are insanely low. There's no income tax like there's no tax that comes straight out of your paycheck. So every month when you get your paycheck, it is that rate, whatever it is minus your pension, that's what you get paid every month. So we see, we see all of our money, and then our pension plans. It's also dead simple, they kind of set it up for you, and they have you like, pick a few investments or something like that, you know, the stuff that I still don't know. But I asked my HR director, and I asked his coworkers, and he helped me figure that out. And so every month, I just get a text message that says how much is in my pension for the taxes, because we have two kids now, we don't have to pay taxes right now. So we just have to file them. And so to file your taxes here, your job fills out a section, it's a page, and then you fill out one or two pages, and then you send all of that to the IR D. And then they send you a letter that says this is how much you owe. Or this is your refund,

and the refund comes immediately with a check. So in that letter, either getting a check or you're getting a bill. But it's like it's so stupid, simple. It's ridiculous. Like I remember filling out our taxes and I have to have an accountant. Like there's no way around it unless you're going to like it like an h&r block or whatever. But you have to have someone do your taxes for you. And here that's not a thing like you just you quickly do it. And it's really low. Sometimes they do provisional taxes, which means you're paying on what you may owe for the next year, you're paying that in advance. It happened to us, I think twice. And then yeah, you pay that in two installments, and then you're good. And then even that, in that we paid a provisional tax, but we had malaria. And so we had two kids. And so we got to resubmit our taxes, which was just calling them saying, Hey, I had a baby. And they're like, okay, thank you for letting us know, we'll send you a letter with an update. And then we got all our tax money back. So it was it again, it makes it a little bit more disenchanted with the states. Because if we're paying all this money with taxes, it's super complicated. And then it goes to what not a free health care system

**CHRISTINE** [00:47:44]

Seriously, What is even the point? safety is crucial, no matter where you live. But how do you deal with political unrest, especially if you did not necessarily expect there to be political unrest?

**DEANNA** [00:48:02]

during the Hong Kong protests, when they were protesting the extradition bill to China. I was coming back from a going-away party one night and we had already seen on Facebook and in the news that we were starting to break up again. And this at this point kind of becomes a weekly thing, especially on the weekends. But we were coming back from this party and we had heard things were getting kind of bad and even what I had forgotten about the party. I was trying to exit one way out of the train station and people running in saying don't come out that way. Don't go out that way. They just shot tear gas. Cool. That's what tonight's gonna be awesome. And so I just went on a different way. Google Maps had to get to the place and it was fine. And so we stayed for a couple of hours on our way home. The area that we were in was dead silence zombie apocalypse silent. And it was weird. It was me and a friend and his wife and we were trying to find, you know, the closest MTR because by that point, our closest train station had closed. And so we were trying to find the next closest and so we're walking and at some at one point we saw people running and we're Black so run the direction that people are running because Avi but it was by that time when we went to turn around it was too late and we got hit with tear gas and oh my god tear, guys. It rips through your eyes, ripples your nose, and your esophagus. It burns like every orifice in your body. And it's terrible stuff, it is some serious stuff. And it's spicy, but not in a good way like it's bad. And so we got hit with tear gas and my friend's wife got hit with it badly. It was in her eyes. And a protester had stopped and had seen us walking away and coughing and stuff. And she had stopped and said do you guys need help? And she gave us to wash and masks awareness and goggles and you know, she was trying to point us in a direction that we can get home. So Like where you guys are trying to go? Okay, you can't go this way, because they're coming down their kind of coming down next from this way. So you know, take a left here go this way go that way bla bla. And that's consistently that night we saw protesters trying to help civilians and other protesters to get home and to, you know, get to safety. So we ended up walking maybe six stations deep to get to a train that was

working before I think they ultimately shut that one down too. So we just made it out. And then the league started imposing an unofficial curfew because everyone takes the train. And so they started closing the trains earlier. So effectively, they had a curfew instituted for the city, which was also crazy. Outside of the protest. Hong Kong is a safe place. I have gone out without my husband to bachelor parties just clubbing or whatever, I don't go out often, but I am very social. So like, I go to clubs or whatever. Everyone's outside, no one's there to bother you or anything. I got drunk at a bachelorette party in January. And I left my credit card at a bar. I didn't realize it for a week because I never used that credit card. And I went back to that bar A week later. And I asked to see if anybody had it. And they're like, oh, give us a second. And so they pull out this giant book of credit cards, I kid you not a binder full of credit cards, and start swiping through the pages like What's your name? Okay, what kind of card is it, and then they had my credit card just sitting there and never used anything, no problem at all. I've dropped my wallet because I'm clumsy after tapping into the train and someone yells at me to turn around to pick it up. And then it's just, yeah, this is kind of the way it is here. Normally, under normal circumstances, that's usually how it goes here. It feels pretty safe. And then a lot of walking around is through alleys, dark alleys, and stuff, which in the States, I would never do, ever, but to get to certain places, you have to cut the rallies and stuff. And that's just normal.

**CHRISTINE** [00:52:00]

I asked Deanna, about her definition of wellness, and health, and how that had been influenced by her living abroad.

**DEANNA** [00:52:11]

I think for me, I didn't, I didn't appreciate that. I could change that my thoughts could change, my self-talk could change, and I could be a different person. And then I took a class over the summer. It was taught by a friend of mine, but it was called How to help a hurting friend. It was just a class about carrying. I had already been in therapy for I think, at least a year because I had postpartum depression after my second pregnancy. But I wasn't making progress in other areas. At least I didn't feel that way. But then I took this caring class. And I saw for the first time how I could change the way I spoke to other people. From there, I started meeting with an executive coach. But in my first session with him, he asked me why I wanted to get into coaching, like why did I need coaching? And what did I want to accomplish? And he just let me talk for maybe 10 minutes of just me talking and he's taking notes. And then he's like, Can I just reflect you what you said. And he was like, so what I gathered from this is you don't think you're good at anything, like at all, not your job, not motherhood, nothing, you don't think you're good at anything. And I'm like, okay, maybe I don't need to put that in my face. But sure, maybe that is how I feel about myself. And I just had never had anybody reflect that back to me to the point where I could grapple with it. But he would give me homework assignments, and things that I had to do in between our sessions. And he was like, Look, do not call me for another session until you complete this assignment that I'd given you. One of the assignments was I had to talk to my boss about where I was at, the kind of feedback that I need from her, and what I need from her as my line manager, which was a super awkward conversation. And I also had to apologize to her for how I perceived her, and how I put my bad history with other bosses onto her. And like she doesn't know that I've done this, but I had to apologize to her about it. And it

was crazy and stupid and hard and so awkward. But it was so good for our relationship. It was crazy good. Even now I'm getting a little bit emotional about thinking about it because, like I didn't realize that my struggle with leadership was holding me back from becoming a leader myself. And I also didn't realize that it was something that I actively needed to change. I just felt like you know, a healthy distrust of all leadership is a good way to go about your life. That is not the case. And so like when I look at self-care, I look at doing that self-reflection, I look at learning more about myself, and how I respond to things, how I react to things, even taking an hour away from my job each week to go to therapy. I do not feel guilty about that. Because if they want me to be a great employee, I need to have great mental health. And so I will do that, or go to the doctor. She wants me to physically be able to go to work. I need to be able to go to the doctor. I am all about individualized mental health and wellness right now. That's a big thing for me.

**CHRISTINE** [00:55:29]

I ended our chat with an ask and asked for all of you out there. I asked Deana what her advice would be for people considering moving abroad,

**DEANNA** [00:55:42]

some sort of advice or encouragement for other women living or traveling abroad. If you get the opportunity to live abroad, take it there is so much more than the city, town, state, or even country that you are currently living in, that will broaden your entire life. And I would argue you don't know fully what you're capable of, or what is possible for you. And until you live truly outside of your comfort zone. That's when you're going to be stretched, that's when you can rise to the occasion. And then also don't expect it to be easy. Sometimes it can be like if you got it like that, but it's gonna be hard, just from either a financial or emotional, you know, or social standpoint, it's going to be hard, it's gonna be shocking, it's gonna be different. Do it anyway. Because I guarantee you who you become, and just who you'll meet, and just the things you'll be able to do with the one life that you're given, you're not going to want to change that for the world. So for moms, especially if you have kids, you don't have to use that as your reason for why you can't go. I left the states with our daughter before she turned to like, they're, they will be okay. They grow and thrive also in that experience because they don't know anything better. So you're setting them up to already know that there is so much more out there than where they were born. And so that's just going to be amazing for you again, it's gonna be hard. It's so worth it. I would not ever change the fact that I moved to Hong Kong, like ever. I don't know what I'm going back to the states Miata, so less, it's like a vacation. But even, you know,

**CHRISTINE** [00:57:42]

I love that story. So if you resonate with this story, if you loved hearing about Deanna, please, please, please follow her on all of her social media handles.

**DEANNA** [00:57:56]

I am like Dean's pretty much everywhere. My last name is denim. And so it's like denim, like jeans. Get it? Like, like jeans. So yeah, I'm like jeans on Instagram. My website is like jeans.com or Deanna denim.com. And then my podcast loses changes on all major podcast platforms. So

Spotify, Apple podcasts, podcaster, Google podcasts, all the things. It's on like eight different platforms right now. And so yeah, you can find me all over the place.

**CHRISTINE** [00:58:30]

I was a guest on her podcast, loose change. So if you haven't heard her podcast before, definitely check out Proud of podcasts when you don't know how to podcast. We had a great time and a really interesting conversation. And also, please share this episode with someone you think would really be interested, someone who is possibly thinking about moving to Hong Kong, someone who dislikes good stories, someone who's interested in just hearing a different perspective about living abroad. Also, if you like the podcast, please be sure to subscribe. rate this podcast five stars on the Apple podcast, and leave a review on whatever platform you're listening on. And of course, Share, share, share, share across all your social media platforms, or just email someone and say, Hey, this is a cool podcast, you should check it out. If you're interested in starting a podcast, I highly recommend checking out the podcasting one-on-one course that is held by frequency media, which is owned by my dear friend Michelle Cody, who is truly instrumental in helping me get this podcast off the ground. All of that information will be in the show notes and if you need music or bees For your YouTube channel, your Instagram, your mixtape that's dropping as soon as Coronavirus is over, whatever, definitely check out my brother, Zachary Higgs who created the theme music for this podcast. I'll leave all of his information in the show notes. Alright, see you guys next week.

On the next episode of *Flourish in the Foreign*,

**VALERIE** [01:00:29]

I just naturally wanted to learn more about their culture and in learning more about ninja indigenous culture. I had a desire to learn more about my own Nigerian culture. And before pre-colonization, what were my ancestors doing before the missionaries came? What was their connection to the land then, you know, if you really dig deep, you realize that African culture is deeply connected as a spiritual thing. It's not like something you can read in books. It's something that you learn from the land. And I saw that in Aboriginal Australian culture as well.