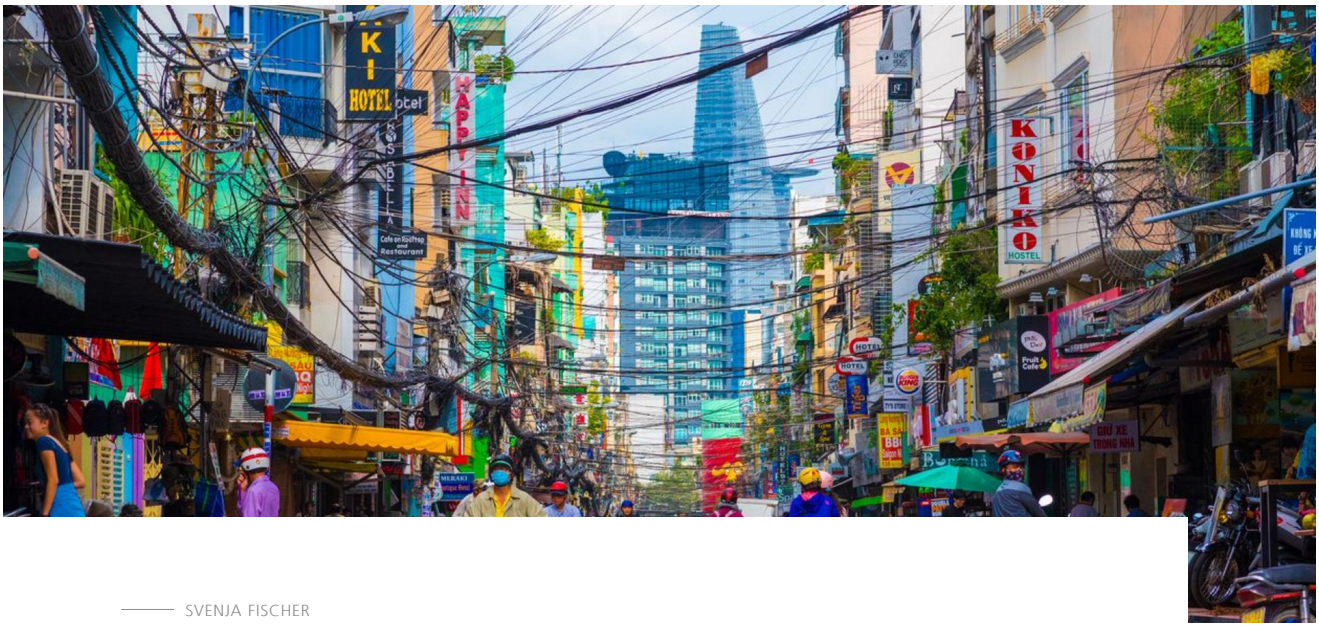
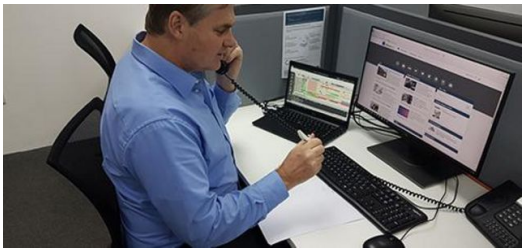


SVENJA FISCHER

Mission Internationalization: Living between two worlds

German industrial companies operate all over the world. They are not just exporting reliable products but also sending personnel to many corners of the globe. But what are the goals that companies are pursuing via internationalization? And how does it feel for personnel to be suddenly working on another continent? Our editors have be doing some research.

Sitting on his office chair, Klaus Meyr surveys the desk in front of him. At first glance, everything looks much the same as it did in his old office in Ditzingen, with the same telephone, laptop and TRUMPF pen. But when he looks out the window he sees the houses of Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Meyr is among the TRUMPF employees who have re-located their workplaces from the company headquarters in Ditzingen to another country. With more than 70 subsidiaries in over 30 countries, TRUMPF is operating all over the world.



The same but different: Klaus Meyr at his desk in Ho Chi Minh City. (Source: TRUMPF)

Mr. Meyr, what prompted you to move from Ditzingen to Ho Chi Minh City? And how did it feel living in a foreign country during those first few months?

The reason I came abroad is simple: it’s fascinating to play a part in setting up an organization in an emerging market with a completely different political system and a foreign culture. People here are very helpful and friendly, so it’s been a positive

experience since day one. The first few months were very interesting because I was seeing new aspects of Vietnam every single day. For a while it was like living between two worlds: my tax paperwork was still in Germany, for example, and things like that caused a few complications every now and then. But essentially it starts out feeling like a big adventure, and then things gradually settle down and become part of your everyday life.

What differences are there between TRUMPF in Germany and TRUMPF in Vietnam?

(Laughs) I hardly know where to begin! The way we work in Germany is heavily influenced by clearly defined areas of responsibility. So you often hear things like "sorry, I'm not responsible for that". But in Vietnam it's the other way around, so you can sometimes end up losing sight of what you're actually meant to be doing! Another example is how long it sometimes takes to reach decisions in Germany, but how fast those decisions are implemented. Again, Vietnam is very different, because you get quick decisions but they take a little longer to put into practice.

Now you have settled into Vietnamese life, what do you particularly like about the country?

People here are tremendously friendly and helpful. They have more to worry about on a daily basis than we have in Germany, but they accept things with good grace and never lose sight of all the wonderful aspects of life – and that's a great quality to have. I particularly like the fact that people do so much outdoors because it's warmer, especially in the evenings when the temperatures are more pleasant.

There must be a few things that you miss from back home?

Absolutely – my family and friends for one thing. But I also miss the changing seasons, the food and local events such as Stuttgart's Weindorf wine festival and Volksfest beer festival. And I definitely miss my soccer team, VfB Stuttgart (laughs).

Now that you have some experience living and working in Vietnam, what advice would you give someone who was thinking of moving abroad?

Life moves at a different pace in other countries, so there's no point in trying to impose your own way of doing things. It's important to respect the local mindset and gradually persuade people using good, solid arguments. It also helps to speak at least a few sentences of the language, because that often encourages people to be much friendlier.

Klaus Meyr has meanwhile already moved on: he is now a process manager in Singapore with responsibility for the Southeast Asia region.

As reasons why companies send their employees abroad, the Federation of German Industries (BDI) refer to the opening up of new markets, foreign investment rules on national rates of value added, and energy costs. For German companies to succeed internationally, free world trade is a pre-condition. Several options are available to gain a foothold abroad, such as foreign trade fairs and export credits. The chemical, pharmaceutical and automotive industries are particularly active outside Germany, but other industries are also establishing themselves ever more strongly on the international market. According to the BDI, almost every fourth German job is therefore dependent on export trade.

SVENJA FISCHER
TRAINEE