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Being Prepared: A Checklist for Expats

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Living outside of your home country can be an extremely rewarding experience. Most of us would agree, however, that with the rewards come some extra responsibilities. One critical area you don't want to overlook is being prepared for an emergency. Think about it: if you were back home and something bad happened (for example, your partner were to become ill or disabled, go missing or get killed), the emotional burden would be tough enough—but at least you'd have a network of people and organizations to go to for help. The same is not necessarily true overseas. If something unfortunate were to happen during your stay in Thailand, having your affairs in order in advance will put you and your family members in a much better position to cope.

Luckily, getting your affairs sorted doesn't have to take much time or energy. To get you started, here's some areas you and your partner will want to address:

Account management—You'll want to be sure you each can access funds in the event something were to happen to either you or your partner. Arrange for joint savings and current/checking accounts if possible with ATM access—ideally both in Thailand and your home country. Keep a list of all credit cards and account numbers handy.

Emergency funds—Have one Thai baht account that each of you can access containing enough to cover between 3-6 months of living expenses. (If you're not sure how much your monthly living expenses are, now's also a good time to draw up a household budget.) Agree with your partner that this account is for emergencies only—so don't touch it unless you absolutely have to! Emergency means something unexpected—not to be used for shopping, surprise gifts, vacations, etc. Ideally, the funds will never be used—but if they are, replace them soon as possible.

Bill payments—Know what bills come due, when, the likely amounts, and how to pay them—whether it be online, using the ATM, by check, direct billing, etc.

Insurance Determine how much insurance you really need (for example balancing company benefits with your individual requirements). Make sure you, your partner, and all family members are adequately covered in the critical areas, i.e., health, disability, and life insurance.

Necessary documents—Keep original documents of all of the following that apply to your situation. These should be readily available to both you and your partner:

- Marriage certificate
- Your birth certificates and those of your children
- Citizenship/naturalization papers

- Adoption papers
- Passports and visas
- Work permits
- Insurance policies (Note: Company, Policy # and Amount of Payment)
- Real estate documents (leases, mortgages, deeds, promissory notes)
- Current list of contact details of immediate next of kin, personal lawyer, trusted friend
- Current list of contact details of people in you or your partner's firm that can help in an emergency (boss, secretary, HR department member, etc.)
- Car title and insurance (registration should be in car)
- All relevant tax payer IDs/Social Security numbers of each family member
- Historic tax filings for both Thailand (PND91s) and your home country (if applicable)
- Current address and telephone numbers of immediate family members for both you and your spouse

Powers of Attorney—Home country A power of attorney is a legal document that allows one person to act for another. You and your partner may each want to get some or all of the following drawn up in your home country so that either of you can act there for the other if needed:

- Durable Power of Attorney for Finance (US) or Financial Lasting Power of Attorney (UK)—appoints an individual (a proxy) to handle all financial affairs in case someone can no longer make financial decisions
- Living Will/Advance health care directive—provides instructions specifying what should be done for someone's health in case they can no longer make decisions.
- Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care (US) or a Lasting Welfare Power of Attorney (UK)—appoints an individual to direct health care decisions should the principal be unable to do so.

Depending on your home country, the types of documents available and the process to enact them may differ, so you'll want to be sure to check with the appropriate legal counsel to ensure you've covered all bases.

Powers of Attorney—Thailand

According to Sally Lefley, Legal Consultant at McEvily & Collins in Bangkok and a UK qualified solicitor, for financial matters, the types of Powers of Attorney that are available in your home country may well also be available or valid here in Thailand. For example, you can give a PoA in regard to a specific bank account or asset or you can give a PoA in regard to all your financial interests or assets. To make sure that each of you can act if needed, you'll either want to make sure that you are joint holders of Thai accounts and financial assets, or that you have PoAs that will be recognized by the financial institutions where your partner holds accounts.

However, note that health care PoAs are not available in Thailand, and while legislation recognizing Living Wills was passed last year, the specific procedures governing them have not yet been issued. You'll want to check with your individual health care giver or hospital to see what their policies are regarding recognizing Thai or foreign health care documents—be sure to do this before any mishap.

Wills Both you and your partner should consider having geographic wills in each country where you own significant assets. Limit them to covering just the assets located in that country. Drawing up a will doesn't have to cost a lot, and you'll save your family members a lot of trouble and later expense by avoiding either dying with no will, or having them try to admit a will drawn up in one country to the probate process in another.

In Thailand holographic wills (hand-written and signed by you and two witnesses) are technically valid, but may cause problems during probate due to unintended omissions, errors, or ambiguities. To avoid the potential for misunderstanding, you may wish to contact a law firm such as McEvily & Collins to have a Thai geographic will drawn up in accordance with Thai law.

Hopefully this list will help get you started in becoming prepared for an emergency. Luckily, chances are that nothing troublesome will happen. But if something were to happen, the consequences would be compounded only if you don't have your affairs in order. In the event of an emergency, being adequately prepared will help you cope. Besides, knowing you are prepared for an unlikely mishap will give you the freedom to fully enjoy your time as an expat.

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