

CALLED TO ADOPTION: INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION



*"Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed."*
Psalms 82:3

International adoption is defined as an adoption where the child lives outside of the United States and is a citizen of another country.

Sometimes international adoption provides more options for prospective parents, such as adoption of an older child or gender specification. Some countries may have more restrictions and eligibility requirements than domestic organizations, but others may be more open. Also, because of the complexity of international adoption, the risk of a birth parent coming to reclaim the child is slim.

Over the course of the last decade, the number of children involved in international adoptions has increased dramatically. Asian-born children from countries such as China, Vietnam, and South Korea top the list of the most common international adoptions. Ethiopia, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine follow.

Before you move forward with an international adoption, it is important to gather information and support. One way to do this is to become involved with an international adoption support group or parent group. You can do this online, or if there are groups in your area, attend meetings in your city.

There are decisions to make before proceeding, such as the country you wish to adopt from, your budget, the time you can afford to spend overseas, and more. All will affect your options. Bear in mind that changing plans midway through international adoption may require back-tracking or possibly starting over.

International adoption is not without risk. Countries are constantly opening and closing their doors to adoption. For example, Haiti, an attractive option for Christian parents, saw its international adoption program halted by a devastating earthquake in 2010.

Countries can also add additional restrictions at any time, such as China did, rendering some parents-in-waiting no longer eligible to adopt. Still others, like Guatemala, can shut down completely due to fraud. Families in the adoption process can find their plans abruptly stopped due to political elements beyond their control.

Five Helpful Tips for International Adoptions

1. Use books, travel magazines, and videos to learn about the countries from which you hope to adopt your child.
2. Work with qualified professionals who have experience in adopting children from those countries.
3. Get involved with online inter-country adoption support and parenting forums.
4. Learn about the country's adoption system through recent experience of others and through your online research.
5. Find local, positive support groups for people who have adopted from your child's country by searching online and through local churches.

To best prepare, take time now to read and study. Learn about international adoption restrictions, including those relative to travel, and find a way to stay updated. An additional risk is simply the unknown. Adoptive parents have traveled to meet their child, only to find out that the child had many more medical or special needs than they were led to believe. Some found peace in their faith and moved forward. Others felt deceived and unprepared to bring home ill children, such as HIV positive babies or those afflicted with cerebral palsy.

Research your options, read the fine print, and talk to other adoptive parents who have had both good experiences and difficult adoptions internationally. You must be very clear with your spouse and yourself about what you can handle. Adoption should not be a purely emotional decision. Remember, this is a lifetime commitment.

WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

Often after a disaster in another country, such as an earthquake or hurricane, hundreds of people will contact the government's social defense department inquiring about adopting. At our center, we are flooded with calls after disasters when the pictures and stories of abandoned children are making news. There is a wonderful outpouring of love toward children shown in these images; however the problem is that the process is not an easy one. Children have to be considered orphans before they can be adopted, and then the paperwork is handled just like any other adoption.

Many big-hearted people don't understand you just can't fly over to a country and bring back a planeload of needy children. There are costs involved with the orphanage, travel, and legal and medical expenses, as well as an abundance of paperwork needed to make the adoption legal. Some of these children are cared for by relatives or other families right after a disaster strikes. Other children are on their own until they are found.

For people reacting to a disaster, we welcome them to consider adoption, but remind them to remember that an emotional decision is not always the best motivator for this lifelong commitment. Immediate assistance can be provided through donations of money or goods to one of the many international aid organizations, such as the Red Cross.

Medical Concerns

In the many years I have worked with adoptive families, I have found that many wear rose-colored glasses when they view a photograph of their prospective child from overseas. The big pleading eyes of an orphan can pull at sympathetic hearts, and sometimes it's only after they bring the child home that they see that poor diet, neglect, and unsanitary living conditions have caused chronic disorders. I can't tell you how many times I've heard, "But they told me she'd be just fine with some good food and love."

The children came to the orphanage because they were abandoned; their parents died or were sick or too poor to provide for them. They likely receive little medical care, may be malnourished or have parasites, or even tuberculosis, developmental delays, or behavioral problems. When your agency finds a child for you to consider, they should send you a referral that includes a child's medical file, background information, and photographs. Choose an agency that will send you a current videotape of the child and any medical reports needing to be translated. Seek out a physician experienced with inter-country adoption.

Paul and Sara were a Christian couple who, in their college years, had both spent time serving in church missions overseas. They had agreed, even before they were married, that they would build their family through international adoption. They completed an adoption of two Ukrainian little boys. When I met Paul and Sara, they were beginning a support group for local families who had adopted from Eastern Europe and Russia.

“We were so naïve,” Sara shared with me. “We thought that love and a Christian home environment would be the foundation to helping Alex and Peter blossom. Thankfully, both boys are now doing well, but for the first twelve months, Paul and I truly didn’t know if we could become a family.”

The boys, both deemed healthy by the orphanage, each had varied needs and diagnoses that included fetal alcohol syndrome, delayed development, attachment issues, and malnutrition. After a difficult first year, the family was beginning to find a balance, a routine, and a normal family life.

“I suppose they were seen as normal children in the orphanage, but unfortunately that left us ill-prepared to be parents to our children,” Sara said. “I believe all families looking into international adoption should expect certain issues and learn about them. If your child has them, you are blessed because you are prepared. If not, then you are doubly blessed!”