



Mobility Matters

#AmericanDigitalNomadinEstonia –
Insights on International Remote Work

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“I’m always up for adventure,” I remind myself as I sit on hold with my company’s help desk from the Lufthansa lounge in Frankfurt—having just spent 13 hours in the air traveling from San Francisco on my way to Tallin, Estonia.

It all started with a phone call from my husband. “I need to make a trip to Europe for work—Cork followed by Tallinn, Estonia—do you want to go with me?”

While most people don’t think of Tallinn as a top tourist destination, the small capital city, home to one of Europe’s best preserved medieval old towns, blends its history with the modern, as a fast-growing technology and cybersecurity hub in Europe. So, like anyone who wants to take advantage of a free hotel, I cashed in some airline miles and booked a ticket—San Francisco to Tallinn with a layover in Frankfurt—after consulting the US Department of State website for travel restrictions and entry requirement information.

Transit: Getting ready and getting there

I knew that this trip would be a bit different as I wouldn’t be taking paid time off (or vacation) and I would be working in Tallinn, which I thought of as a new challenge—a chance to experience the life of a digital nomad like the ones I followed on Instagram and TikTok throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. I also made sure to look up what clothes to pack given that Tallinn is so far north and confirmed the adapters I would need for my laptop, phone, and tablet. I also brushed up on local etiquette and culture such as tipping culture, opening and closing times for businesses, and local foods and restaurants to try.

So, on May 23, I packed a suitcase and my favorite blue work bag and headed to the airport arriving four hours before my flight. I then headed directly to a lounge following the security clearance.

Because of the length of flights and large stretches of time in transit, I did some research on how to make the most of my time and structured my calendar to include calls I could take from the airport. Planning for lounge access gave me a dedicated work carrel with coffee, a preflight sparkling wine, and breakfast.



Fifteen minutes before boarding, I shut my laptop and headed to the plane for 13 hours of watching movies, catching up on a book, and a few hours of shut-eye. If you’ve ever seen the movie *The Holiday*, I felt like Cameron Diaz on her flight to London—without the lay-flat seat.

I woke two hours before arriving in Frankfurt, which is a fantastic hub for European travel. Once through security clearance, I headed to an airport lounge, and plugged in for four hours of work time. As soon as my computer started up I was greeted by an email error. “I’m always up for adventure,” I remind myself as I sit on hold with the company’s help desk. I was luckily back online in under 15 minutes with instructions on what to do if it happened again—crisis averted. I knew the lounge wouldn’t offer dedicated workspaces, so I used that time to work on a “heads-down” project. I put my headphones in, grabbed a pretzel and an apple juice from the continental breakfast, and got to work, finishing up roughly 30 minutes before boarding.

I finally arrived in Tallinn around 5:30 p.m. local time after traveling for roughly 17 hours, and ended my day with a glass of wine at the hotel bar with my husband and his colleagues.

Tallinn: Combining sightseeing and work

The next morning, I was ready to begin my first day as a digital nomad. One of my challenges was balancing known work calls and projects with my desire to see as much of the city as possible. So, taking inspiration from several Instagram travel bloggers, I did what any good digital nomad would do and created a map of coffee shops and restaurants that catered to digital workers where I knew I would have a secure internet connection and enough space. I chose two locations each day with a morning spot on one side of the city and my postlunch spot on the other. This allowed me to get up and stretch my legs midday and to do a bit of lunchtime sightseeing before heading back into my next work location for food or a coffee, and of course, work.

The great thing about this was that most of my workday happened while my home office in the US was asleep, affording me uninterrupted work time and the ability to connect with colleagues at the end of my day while they were waking up. I would head back to the hotel around 3:30 p.m. each day for two hours of calls.



I also used this time to let my team know what I needed from them for their workday, which allowed them to continue to work on items while I spent evenings sampling Estonian cuisine, wine, and taking several walking tours around the city. While doing so, I made sure to have my phone with me so I could answer Teams or text messages.

This meant I wasn’t just working from a local coffee shop or the hotel, but I found myself answering a quick message from the top of the city walls looking out over the Baltic Sea, sending off a text message while trying a local Estonian wine, and sending a few pictures to the team in the US as I went along.

After about a week, I ended my working, digital nomad lifestyle on the ferry from Tallinn to Helsinki, Finland, eating a Whopper at the world’s only floating Burger King, and delivering a project to our technology user experience team as we crossed the international border. I put on my “out of office” message and closed my laptop just as the KPMG LINK Go app¹ alerted me that I’d entered Finland.



To sum it all up

Experiencing the life of a digital nomad was extremely exciting. Along the way, I picked up a few tips for those looking to create their own “nomadic” experience:

Plan ahead... and for the unexpected: Make sure that you plan accordingly when working remotely, especially from abroad. This includes understanding when you’ll be able to work, the type of location you’ll be in, identifying the type of work that is best suited to that location, and making sure you have the right connection and adapters. For me, this meant taking calls at different times, being more communicative with my team about availability, and leveraging use of the airport lounges available through the network of airline alliances/partnerships to help ensure I had reliable, fast internet while in transit.

For longer stays, you’ll also want to familiarize yourself with other local requirements such as registration with local authorities, whether you need a physical address and/or phone number for purposes of securing your visa or prearrival/on-arrival application paperwork

(especially important if you're just planning to find a place to stay once you land), how best to access cash and the location's acceptance of credit/debit cards, and if there are any prearrival health requirements as well as how healthcare works in your chosen location. It's also not a bad idea to know where your local home-country embassy and/or consulate is and how to get there.

Stay compliant: Before visiting, I checked out the U.S. Department of State website to look at what I needed prior to traveling and working in Tallinn. It's also a good idea, especially if you plan on working, to work with your company's travel department to complete a business travel risk assessment. Many globally mobile employees who travel—if they have access to it—can use the KPMG Global Mobility Services (GMS) practice's KPMG LINK Business Traveler tool.² This will help identify any risks before you travel.

Use time zones to your advantage: Because I was 10 hours ahead of the west coast of the US (my home region), I was able to create a 24-hour working model where I connected with my teams at the end of my day, and they would work while I slept. This allowed us to move projects forward quickly and efficiently.

Live like a local, and I mean LIVE: Estonia has an interesting work culture that doesn't seem to begin until around 10:00am. This meant cafes opened later in the morning than I was used to, and it forced me to adapt and live on local time. I was able to sleep in a bit more in the morning to combat jet lag, but at the same time take advantage of places being open later in the evenings. I also took longer lunches and tried to immerse myself in the slower pace of Tallinn.

Be sure to create strict boundaries for work so that you can meet your work demands but also experience the location you're in. Whether it's taking a longer lunch or making sure to log out by a specific time, be sure to give yourself time and space to really be a part of the culture you've immersed yourself in as a digital nomad.

Maximize your benefits: Many companies offer attractive travel benefits to employees including reimbursement for security clearances at airports (normally via a corporate credit card), access to priority and airport lounges via lounge agreements or corporate credit cards, and discounts via their travel provider or a third-party agency that may include preagreed hotel rates or airline perks. Look into these benefits prior to traveling. They can help alleviate some of the pressures of travel and even help save some money.

Visit colleagues or clients: While I couldn't get to the KPMG office in Tallinn (though I did look up where it was), I think working as a digital nomad is a fantastic chance to explore other offices and colleagues of your company or even meet clients around the world. I've done this in the past—meeting clients in Berlin when I was there on assignment. While in Tallinn, I was able to connect with a client in Romania, which is hard from home because of the time difference. Think of being a digital nomad as a way to expand your horizons and expand your network.

FYI: Estonia offers a digital nomad visa, if you wish to "officialize" your digital nomad status. See (in English): <https://www.e-resident.gov.ee/nomadvisa/>

¹ KPMG LINK Go is the KPMG Global Mobility Services' app that allows KPMG employees and client taxpayers to automatically track travel using geo-location services on their mobile devices as well as upload or download tax documents and check the status of tax returns (if applicable). The application is available in the Apple App and Google Play store.

² KPMG LINK Business Traveler assesses risks related to international and domestic travel related to entry requirements, social, and income tax. More information on KPMG LINK Business Traveler can be found at: <https://tax.kpmg.us/services/global-mobility/kpmg-link-work-force/kpmg-link-business-traveler.html>.

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