

Offshore success stories: Q&A with Michael Robinson

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In a recent interview with recruitment specialists Robert Walters, Associate Michael Robinson shares his insights on the process of moving jurisdictions and working in an offshore firm.

Michael, you have now been offshore for approaching five years. Can you tell us a little about the decision-making behind your initial move to Jersey on qualification? What did your thought process involve, and did you have any reservations about making the move?

I knew that I no longer wanted to practice law in the UK following the completion of my training contract. The long hours and low pay in the regional law firms were not an attractive combination. I was therefore very flexible and open-minded as to the next steps for my career. It was Ken at Robert Walters that gave me the idea to apply for a role at Ogier in Jersey and I have never looked back since. Even at the interview, I knew that Ogier had the working culture that I sought with a large focus on work-life balance and having a great work-reward ratio. I can confidently say I had no reservations about making the move. I planned on being here for two to three years so what was the worst that could happen?

How did you find the process of moving offshore – from the interview process through an offer to actually getting over there to start?

I found it incredibly smooth. The interview was a two-stage process, the first stage being a telephone interview and the second stage being in person in Jersey. Ogier took excellent care of me during the interview process and the eventual move to Jersey. I was offered a competitive salary and generous relocation package to finance the move and was also allowed time off in between jobs to pack up and travel before I relocated.

How did you find the move initially? Was there anything that surprised you or anything that you found challenging? What did you enjoy about having made the move and was it easy to integrate?

There were some initial challenges - principally getting used to life on a small island with no friends or acquaintances. As the majority of people in Jersey are born and raised here, it was difficult breaking into social circles and making friends. At first, I found myself travelling back to the UK every other weekend which was not sustainable or affordable. However, after 12 months the "island fever" had passed and – strange as it sounds - I began to appreciate life cut off from the mainland. After 24 months I had a good group of friends and finally started to feel settled. As I had always planned to leave after 2-3 years, this was unexpected!

What was it like living in Jersey?

As above, there are some challenges and it does take time to settle somewhere new. However, eventually, I came to love Jersey. It has much better summers than mainland UK (especially Manchester!), has more festivals, parades and public holidays than mainland UK and also has a great coastal culture which I think has something for everyone, be it surfing, kite surfing, coastal walks, coastering, running etc. You also never fully leave the UK as you are always a 40-minute flight back so you can maintain relationships effectively. And with St Malo only an

hour away I could also get across to France to change things up.

You then made the move to the Cayman Islands – Ogier were happy to accommodate your desire to relocate to the Cayman office. How did you find the move and what do you think of Cayman? How does Cayman compare to Jersey?

Having struggled with SAD syndrome for a number of years, I always wanted to try living somewhere warm and sunny. And whilst I loved Jersey, it is not the Caribbean. I, therefore, requested a move. Being an incredibly flexible and open-minded firm, Ogier accommodated the request. I had to interview for the position but was eventually granted a role in Ogier Cayman's corporate team.

Again, the move was smooth and Ogier were brilliant, offering a good relocation package and taking care of me throughout the process. Now that I am settled in Cayman, I love it here and am looking forward to working here for a number of years to come. With a much larger expat community, it was admittedly easier to make friends and break into social circles than Jersey. However, having a much larger transient community brings challenges as people come and go and you are constantly making and losing friends. The transience of Cayman is a slight disadvantage if you plan on moving longer than 2-3 years.

What has the work been like that you have been involved in?

The work in both offshore jurisdictions is excellent quality, working on the largest deals in the world for some of the largest clients in the world. Having done mostly private M&A and finance work in Jersey, I have tried to maintain this practice in Cayman. However, as Cayman is a popular jurisdiction for blockchain and cryptocurrency projects, a lot of my practice has shifted to advising on such projects, including "initial coin offerings", "security token offerings" and now "initial exchange offerings". Additionally, as a funds-focused jurisdiction, I have also had exposure to funds work as well.

Do you have any advice for lawyers who might be on the fence about making a move offshore? What are the pros and cons as you see them? What were the key barriers or apprehensions you had before making the decision to move and what made you overcome these to end up making the move?

To be honest offshore is not for everyone. The cons are that you are more than likely going to be moving to a small island where you don't know anyone. However, if you are looking for a different way of life focused on work-life balance but without sacrificing a high standard of living or quality of work then moving offshore is a great option. Personally, I had contemplated giving up my legal profession entirely in the UK or moving in-house to escape the ever more demanding work-focused culture growing in the UK legal industry. Moving offshore renewed my faith in my career choice and has given me a new path and a new lease of life.

About Ogier

Ogier provides practical advice on BVI, Cayman Islands, Guernsey, Jersey and Luxembourg law through its global network of offices. Ours is the only firm to advise on these five laws. We regularly win awards for the quality of our client service, our work and our people.

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