

# PMNetwork®

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From left, Peter Moutsatsos, PMP, Warwick Bray, Terence Koo and Rob Loader, PMP



# Aim to



# WVA



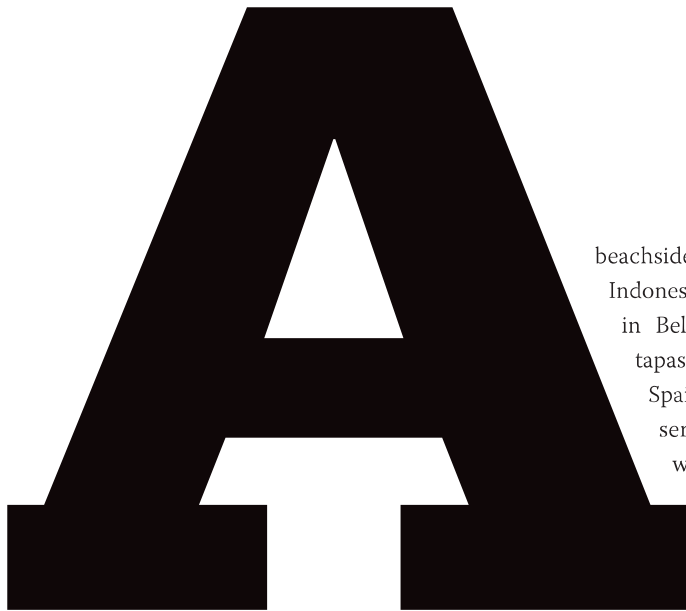
Digital nomads must plan for communication risks as they deliver projects—and travel the world.

BY AMBREEN ALI



# in der





beachside house in Bali, Indonesia. A smoky cafe in Belgrade, Serbia. A tapas bar in Valencia, Spain. These all have served as remote workplaces for Bryant Burnheimer, a software project manager who's

among the growing number of digital nomads: professionals who travel the world, laptop in tow, working from different destinations. Some work as full-time remote employees, staying in one location for several months or even a year. Others freelance, hopping from project to project as they move among destinations.

Although not every digital nomad is a project or program manager, the lifestyle requires smart planning and strong communication, so project professionals can be particularly well-suited to it, says Mr. Burnheimer, who after traveling for a year

returned to the home office of his employer, Higher Logic, in Washington, D.C., USA. The travel can have a positive impact on their work, as well: "Being a digital nomad gives you this chance to experience different cultures and perspectives on a daily basis, and that can relay into how you work with people on projects."

Those who've made the most of digital nomad opportunities share their hard-earned insights.

#### **GETTING—AND STAYING—CONNECTED**

Perhaps the biggest challenge amid constant working travel is finding reliable, secure internet access. Mr. Burnheimer chose to travel with a program called Remote Year, which manages many logistics, including connecting participants with internet access. In Morocco, that meant setting up a virtual private network that allowed Mr. Burnheimer to bypass local restrictions—a real risk to consider when traveling to areas with censorship or internet use limits, he says.

Those traveling independently, however, need to plan ahead and prepare for last-minute disruptions.

## **Have Project, Will Travel**



### **Bryant Burnheimer**

Software project manager, Higher Logic, Washington, D.C., USA

**Why he became a digital nomad:**

"The chance to see the world and experience new cultures while maintaining a career."

**Biggest project challenge:** "Time zone management."

**Most memorable location:** "Lisbon, Portugal. I implemented quite a few client implementations, including project timelines, check-ins, webinars and trainings, during my time there."

The five-hour time difference from my home office made for a manageable workday, and the country as a whole offers a wide variety of places to see, visit and explore."

**Tips for project managers considering the digital nomad lifestyle:** "Figure out a plan of action. Have a work schedule that works for both you and your clients. Take time to get settled in your new location and come up with a daily routine."



**“Being a digital nomad gives you this chance to experience different cultures and perspectives on a daily basis, and that can relay into how you work with people on projects.”**

—Bryant Burnheimer, Higher Logic, Washington, D.C., USA

Victoria Chemko, a project manager and founder of Umami Marketing who is based out of Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, says she is always prepared to leave a new location if she can't find a reliable network. She has done so twice—once in Myanmar and once in Laos.

Once Ms. Chemko is sure she can get online in a new location, she prefers to settle in for a few weeks. “I want to balance being able to enjoy a new location and getting the project done,” she says.

Beyond access, network security should be a con-

sistent priority—especially when using public connections, says Roxanne Cabrana, a freelance project manager from Cebu City, the Philippines. “Create security ground rules or standard security procedures ahead of time,” she says—then stick to them, no matter how slow the connection or remote the cafe.

#### **NETWORKING AROUND THE GLOBE**

Project and program managers can travel the world without having their careers tread water—if they “remember, just like when you're at home, you have

## **Victoria Chemko**

Founder and inbound strategist, Umami Marketing, originally from British Columbia, Canada

**Why she became a digital nomad:** “The world has so much to offer. Being a digital nomad allows me to blend my personal and professional goals without having to wait until later on in life to do so.”

**Biggest project challenge:** “Finding fast, reliable Wi-Fi no matter where in the world I am.”

**Most memorable location:** “Thailand.”

**Tips for project managers considering the digital nomad lifestyle:** “Mitigate risks as much as possible by planning well in advance for all the details—tools for communication, where you will be at which part of your project, etc.—and be very transparent to all stakeholders and project team members along the way.”



to network, network, network,” says Rebecca Males, head of community for digital nomad coworking space Outside, Lisbon, Portugal.

Networking has gotten easier in recent years, thanks to a bumper crop of online sites tailored to digital nomads, says Ms. Males. And Ms. Cabrana notes that sites such as LinkedIn have made tapping an extended professional network easier than ever. There are also local PMI chapters with open meetings in many countries.

“Becoming a digital nomad can open new doors for you, as you’re suddenly thinking in a different way to being in the office. You take courses in your extra time, have conversations that might not have happened otherwise,” Ms. Males says. “However, you are responsible for your own progression and education. If you’re not happy working independently or autonomously, it might not be for you.”

### SYNCING WITH THE TEAM

Project professionals on virtual teams know how onerous juggling time zones can be. But the impact

is even greater when digital nomad travel means time zones are constantly shifting.

An extended trip through Southeast Asia put Mr. Burnheimer 12 hours ahead of his team working on a software implementation project. That schedule was successful, he says, “because I did a really good job of setting expectations on response times and call options.” He also took a more flexible approach to his own workday: During the project’s execution phase, when the team required more frequent video chats to talk through specific tasks, he jumped on the line during the middle of the night more than once.

Doubling down on documentation can go a long way toward answering team questions, even when the project manager is in transit or asleep on the other side of the globe, says Ms. Chemko. Her team is spread out in North America and Europe. Having the right tools and processes in place has been key to keeping tasks and projects on track, she says. **PM**

**“Create security ground rules or standard security procedures ahead of time.”**

—Roxanne Cabrana, Cebu City, the Philippines

# Have Project, Will Travel



## Roxanne Cabrana

Freelance project manager, originally from Cebu City, Philippines

**Why she became a digital nomad:** “It’s the best career opportunity that gives me the best of both worlds: doing the work that I am passionate about while enjoying the freedom to travel.”

**Biggest project challenge:** “Team miscommunication. More often than not, textual thoughts are misconstrued for something else. I back up text with calls and/or conferences, with proper documentation right after. Rule of thumb: Never assume that everything’s doing well. Be alarmed if no one asks

questions or clarifies. Chances are something’s not right.”

**Most memorable location:** “A camping site at the heart of the city in Cebu City. Amidst the urban chaos, I found peace. I was bursting with ideas and work vibes. I find it true that your work environment contributes a lot to your productivity.”

**Tips for project managers considering the digital nomad lifestyle:** “If you’re waiting for a sign, this could be it. This is your ticket to shooting two birds with one stone: career and independence.”



Palolem Beach, Goa, India.  
Below, coworking and  
startup incubation facility  
IGNITE-EDC Innovation Hub  
in Panaji, Goa, India

# Attracting More Nomads

**T**he coastal state of Goa in western India is a popular tourist destination more often associated with sprawling beaches and remote fishing villages than tech companies. But the growing interest among digital nomads to be stationed in places like Goa is sparking a flurry of projects in the local tech sector.

Government-owned financial institution EDC Ltd. opened a coworking and startup incubation facility, IGNITE-EDC Innovation Hub, in the Goan capital of Panaji in July to address the main obstacles to working from Goa: poor internet connectivity and

a power grid that can be inconsistent. The facility features a redundant internet connection and a power backup to eliminate those challenges. This makes the region, which is less congested and more affordable than India's big cities, more of a possibility for nomads and startups seeking a better quality of life, says Sidharth Kuncalienker, chairman, EDC Ltd., Panaji.

"Entrepreneurs and digital nomads naturally opt for convenience and hassle-free business operations, so they can focus on building their ideas and business. EDC Ltd. decided to ride on that insight and help



Goa attract this talented lot," Mr. Kuncalienker says.

The INR60 million project began in January and was designed with digital nomads in mind: The facility features private meeting rooms and phone booths, and the space operates 24 hours a day to accommodate workers with teams in varying time zones. Members access the

space with electronic access cards, and network security has been implemented to protect transmitted data.

Completed in July, the project will be under close scrutiny in the years ahead. Mr. Kuncalienker says, "It is hoped that this facility contributes toward the growth of the overall startup ecosystem in Goa."