

Chatterbox #294 – The highs and lows of living abroad

Episode description

Have you ever thought about living abroad? That's the discussion topic for this Chatterbox episode. Join Andrew and Anna as they share their experiences of living in a foreign country and talk about the ups and downs of living abroad.

Chatterbox is a series for intermediate and advanced English learners in which native English speakers have natural conversations on interesting topics. This series is designed to help you improve your English listening and speaking fluency in a fun way.

Fun fact

Did you know that the United Arab Emirates' population mostly consists of foreigners? Expats constitute over 88% of this country's population. That means only 12% are native-born residents.

Expressions included in the study guide

- Red tape
- To bend over backwards
- A loophole
- To keep [someone] on [their] toes
- To be on the fence
- YOLO



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript. The transcript has been edited for clarity.

Andrew: Hello, everyone, my name is Andrew.

Anna: And my name is Anna.

Andrew: And you're listening to the Culips English Podcast.

Hello, listeners. Welcome back to Culips. This is Chatterbox, our series for intermediate and advanced English learners that features natural, unedited conversations between native speakers about interesting topics. Today, I'm joined by my cohost, Anna. Hey there, Anna.

Anna: Hi, Andrew. And hello, listeners. Everyone, today we've got a really fun topic lined up for you all. And Andrew and I are going to talk about something very personal, and maybe something that you've experienced as well, which is the highs and lows of living abroad. It's not all fun and games when you live in another country. So if you're new to Chatterbox, you might not know this, but Andrew and I both live abroad at the moment from our home countries. And we've got lots of interesting stories about this. And today, we're going to share a few of them with you.

Andrew: Exactly. And it's a really interesting fact here at Culips, Anna, that our whole team live abroad. I don't know how this happened. It wasn't planned for, it just sort of weirdly happened that everybody that's involved with Culips lives in a different country than their home country. So, yeah, we have a lot of experience with this at Culips. And I think a lot of our listeners have some experiences with this, as well. A lot of our listeners are immigrants or study-abroad students. So I think this is one that many people can relate to and if you can't directly relate to it either, well, that's fine. I think there will at least be some interesting or funny stories for you guys to check out in this episode.

So I'm looking forward to our chat, Anna, but before we get started with it, let's remind everyone about the study guide for this episode. So, guys, in the study guide, you'll find detailed vocabulary definitions and examples, there's a quiz, and there are also prompts that you can use for speaking or writing practice. We recommend following along with the guide while you listen to this episode. And to get the study guide, you just need to become a Culips member. And you can find out all of the details and sign up on our website, which

is Culips.com, C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Becoming a member helps support the work we do here at Culips, but it also gives you access to all of our learning materials and the tools that we make to help you improve your English and get fluent faster.

Now at the start of each episode, we always love to give a shout-out to one of our listeners who has left us a review or a message. And recently, we received a great review on Apple Podcasts from one of our listeners from Japan, named Tatsujah, and I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly. But this is what Tatsujah had to say. He wrote, "I've been enjoying every episode on the podcast repeatedly for a couple of years, and I'm looking forward to a new episode every week. Thank you guys for delivering episodes that cover pretty interesting, fun, and versatile topics. I especially enjoyed Simplified Speech #147 very much because I've been collecting various genres of vinyl records for over 30 years and Neil Young is one of my favourite artists, too. I'm glad to hear that Andrew started listening to music on vinyl again. I wish to talk about music and vinyl with Andrew someday. Keep on diggin', Andrew."

So, Tatsujah, thank you so much for that review. And Tatsujah, if you're not familiar with this cover band yet, you have to go on to YouTube and search for the Japanese cover band of Neil Young. It's one of the most remarkable cover bands of him that I've ever seen. I'm not sure what the band is called but if you just type in Japanese Neil Young cover, it will come up. And I think you are one of the many Neil Young fans in Japan. Surprisingly, he's big in Japan, Anna.

Anna: No surprises there. Well, thank you so much for your review. And thanks to everybody out there who has been leaving us reviews and subscribing to us on your favourite podcast app, or even telling your friends to check us out. This helps so many other English learners around the world connect and learn with us. So please keep it up.

Andrew: Absolutely. So, with all of this being said, it is time to get started. And our main topic for this episode is really just chatting about our experiences as expats or foreigners living in a country that is different from our home country. So of course, Anna, you're from the UK, but are living in Spain now. And I'm from Canada, but I'm living in South Korea.

Anna, I'm curious about what it's like to get started living in Spain. Could you tell us a little bit about, like, your first experience, maybe your first days living in Spain, what that was like?

Anna: Yeah, so I'm going to split it up actually a little bit, because I'm going to say that I had a bit of time before I had to do any of the kind of administrative things, because I wanted to give myself a little bit of break in time to see if I liked it, to see if I wanted to stay.

So I kind of chilled out for about 3 months getting to know Spain and things like this. But one of the things that you don't really realize until you live in another country is what it's like to be a foreigner. Because you can go on holiday and you can go to different places, and of course you feel like a tourist. But it's very different when you actually start the process to become a foreigner living in another country. And I'd never really known what that felt like.

So when I had to get my card or whatever it is they have here, like a number that you have to get and it's the key to everything. You have to get this number if you want to a bank account, you have to get this number if you want to get a job. So, I mean, it's like the thing that you need if you want to live there. Also, it's important to mention that I moved to Spain before Brexit.

Andrew: I was going to ask you about that. So that means that, before Brexit, the UK was part of the European Union, and then I'm guessing you could live and work in Spain without a visa. What was the process like pre-Brexit?

Anna: Literally, you could decide one day, I want to live in the UK, and then the next day you could say I want to live in Spain. It's literally was that simple. I mean, you could just move there. Obviously, you need this number, the key to everything, it's called a NIE number, so you needed that. But apart from that, you could just literally turn up and start working and get a job if you wanted to. I mean, that was amazing. And I know it's not the same anymore.

But yeah, we had to get this one NIE number. And my goodness, it was the most frustrating experience I've ever had in my life. And that was the first time that I realized what it's like, or I had a little flavour of what it's like, to be a foreigner in a different country, because it's not all good. Like sometimes, I don't know, if you felt like this, Andrew, but they made you feel like a bit of an idiot. I'm not joking.

To get this card, OK, and I know the process has changed now so, I'm not going to criticize it too much because I know it's different now. At this time, what you had to do to get this card, there was only one specific office that you had to go to in the middle of Madrid to get this card. OK, there's one office. You have to go there, OK, and the office opens at 9:00, right? And you have to queue up outside and they let in, depending on the day, they'll let in 20 people, 30 people, 40 people. So it depends on the mood they're in on that day. And if you want to get one of these numbers, you had to queue up from like 4:00 in the morning, OK, so that you would be one of the first in the queue.

And so, the worst thing was, I didn't plan this very well. But the worst thing was that I was trying to do this in December. So not only did I have to queue up from 5:00 in the morning, but it was absolutely freezing. And I was there with all these other people who wanted this number as well. So you had to get there at like 5:00 in the morning, wait outside for like 4 hours. And then the worst thing was that I'd done this like twice, the first time I completely messed it up and I wasn't early enough.

The second time, I got to the front and then they said, "No more." And I was like, "Oh my God, you're joking." So, I've been waiting for like 4 hours. And then they just turned around and said, "Oh, no, no, sorry. We're not taking any more people." I was like 31, and they'd let in 30 people. I mean, it was just the most frustrating experience. And I thought, I don't know why, but I just thought, well, why don't they have like an online process? Or why can't I just go somewhere and get an appointment?

But that wasn't how it was and, you know, it wasn't a nice experience and it makes you feel like you're a burden. Like they're kind of like, oh, more people that want to live here, like, you know, another NIE. So I don't know, I haven't had a great experience with that type of bureaucracy because I guess for them you're kind of like, I don't know, maybe for some of them they think, oh, I can't be bothered these people, they're not important or ... I don't know, that's the vibe that I got.

Anyway, did you get any of those vibes when you went to Korea, when you started there? Did you get those kind of, like, you're not welcome here, you can't sit with us vibes?

Andrew: Yeah, not so much that but the experience that I've had visiting the immigration office when I've needed to get my alien registration number, it's called here in Korea, it's alien registration.

Anna: Oh, alien?

Andrew: Alien, yeah. Meaning like foreigner, I'm an alien.

Anna: Oh, right.

Andrew: Which is also interesting because in Korean, the Korean language, the word for foreigner is waegookin and the word for alien, like an outer-space person living outside of Earth, is waegaein. So, they're very similar in the Korean language. And also, I guess in English, we could say that a foreigner is an alien and also a creature from space is an alien. Anyways, that's the name. And I think I heard a rumour that they're going to be changing that because it made some people feel uncomfortable to be referred to as an alien.

Anna: Yeah, obviously.

Andrew: That aside, my experience getting my alien registration number and doing everything at immigration has always been stressful, but nothing that I felt was personally aggressive or negative. It is a bureaucracy, so there's a lot of **red tape**. And the workers are very stressed. And they're dealing with a high volume of people.

When you go to a retail store, it's always like the customer's always right, and you have the staff at the store kind of **bending over backwards** to make sure customers are happy. And, you know, if you have poor customer service, your business might go out of business and fail. But at a government office, like the immigration office, they're not worried about customer service, right? You can complain as much as you'd like and it doesn't matter, they're still going to be in existence, they're still going to have jobs the next day. So, yeah, they're always, like, bureaucratic, not really friendly or mean. It's just I would give them my papers, they would stamp the papers, maybe ask me some questions.

I do kind of sympathize with them because every time I'm at the immigration office, it's always a zoo, like you mentioned, Anna. In Spain, it seems like you have to wait in line. Thankfully, in Korea, it's a little bit more high tech. You have to make an appointment online and you can do it all on the website. But that being said, the last time I visited immigration, there was a huge scene in the office. Like, even though I made an appointment in advance, there was still tons of people there. And I guess there's a **loophole** with the appointment system because if your visa is about to expire, and there's 1 day left on your visa, you can go without an appointment because you have to renew your visa, so you can get an appointment on that day.

So there was like a ton of people that had shown up that were on their visa, the last day, they were trying to get their visas renewed before they expired. I think they were migrant workers, and there was a big language issue, so there were some people trying to translate. And, yeah, it was in the middle of a summer, it was very hot, it was chaotic. Everybody in there is stressed. The workers are stressed. People who are trying to get their visas are stressed. The people who are on the very last day of their visa, who are trying to get it renewed or face deportation are stressed. And then there's a big language barrier in many situations, as well. So it's just like a really unpleasant place to work, probably. I can't imagine that it's fun to work there.

Also, big consequences if you make a mistake, right? If you are not careful with people's background checks and maybe you let a criminal into the country or something, right? Could be some consequences for you. So everybody wants to do a good job, it's a high-

pressure situation. So I've never had a positive immigration visit. Like, I've never walked in and walked out and been like, oh, that was awesome, I want to do it again tomorrow.

Anna: Yeah, it's not like you wake up in the morning, and you're like, oh, do you know what I really want to do, I just really want to go renew my NIE. Like, absolutely not, it's like the last thing that you want to do. And you're right, that's a really good point to make, is that it is a stressful situation. People there, they want, you know, they want to make sure that they get their permission to live there, you know, the staff probably don't have a great experience, because they're dealing with people that are a little bit stressed. So that's a really important thing to say, as well. It's obviously not necessarily the easiest job in the world.

I remember, you know, when we left the European Union, then I had to kind of go and do some more administrative things. And I had to change my driving license from an English license to a Spanish license. And luckily, I have to say that I have had people who have been able to come with me because, honestly, without it, it would have been absolutely impossible to navigate. OK, not impossible, that's a lie, but much more difficult. It would have been very painful because at the beginning, my Spanish was next to zero. So imagine trying to communicate with a person who's using language that is just, like, beyond I need this, I want this. Can you do that? I mean, it was that was like basically my vocabulary at the beginning. So luckily, I had people to help me, which I think was at an absolute godsend.

But look, I mean, it's not all bad. One thing that I do think, considering its highs and lows, let's talk about some of the highs as well. So, one of the lows is definitely that it's stressful. And imagine if you were a person that's been displaced, or you're a refugee, for example. And you've just moved from a country that has a completely different culture, language, whatever, and you just arrive in this country. And then you have to do all these processes as well. It just kind of made me think, like, wow, that would be really, really stressful and just, like, really hard to process. So, I feel like in my case was very, a very light case of kind of, you know, dealing with this. But I thought, wow, it must be so hard for people that just kind of have to come here and then they're like, what do I do?

Andrew: Especially if you think about us, because we planned to go to these countries. I spent, you know, almost a year preparing to move abroad, reading books about Korea, going to Korean restaurants, talking with my Korean friends about what I can expect, learning some of the language. Refugees don't have those luxuries. Often you know, a conflict breaks out, and we gotta get out of here as soon as possible. And they'll go wherever they're welcome, right? Wherever they can go. And so you have no time to prepare and if that means that you arrive in a country with a different language, different

culture that you weren't expecting and then you have to do all these things that we mentioned, Anna. You have to go to these offices where there's, you know, high stress and lots of pressure and, yeah, it's not something that I would ever want to go through. And hopefully, I don't have to, but I definitely empathize with the people who do have to do that.

Anna: Absolutely. I'm going to talk about some of the things that I do like about—one of the highs, I would say. And I think maybe I've mentioned this before, but it's something that I think it's important to say, is that when you live in a different country, all of the basic things like going to the office or going to, you know, do whatever, go into the supermarket, everything is automatically more interesting because it's in a different language. You know, it's a little bit more exciting.

So even just sort of things like going to buy bread or, I don't know, go into the supermarket, for me, all of those little interactions are like more interesting, because, you know, it's not in my own language, you know, I've kind of got to navigate them a little bit, I've got to figure out what I'm going to say. OK, yes, maybe it's a little bit stressful. But all of those things are more interesting. And I think about, when I look at my life in Spain, I feel like my life is very normal. And maybe I actually do less things than I used to do in the UK. But for me, my life is not less interesting, because I think just being in another place makes things more, yeah, stimulating or just kind of, I don't know, I think I actually have a more boring life, though, in Spain, to be honest, and maybe that's because I already feel like I'm very interested by my surroundings, by what's going on because that's still different for me. So, for me, that's definitely one of the highs, is that you can have, like, just a really stimulating experience being around things that aren't what you're used to.

But on the other hand, I would say that sometimes it can feel quite isolating. Sometimes you feel like, you know, not connecting with people, maybe, is one of my lows. You know, not having that full connection with people because you don't have the same background, you don't have the same culture. So, I would say that's one of my lower points. But, yeah, I would say that's one of the highs for me is that it's just more interesting.

Andrew: Yeah, literally, everything about living in a different country is interesting to me. And I completely understand what you're trying to say, Anna, I also agree. Like, just going to the supermarket, you know, if I did that in Canada, that's something I can do just on autopilot, right? I don't have to think too much about it. But when I do it in Korea, even though I've been here for years now, it's still always interesting. There's always something that I'm, like, what's this? Like, I'll see some different vegetable that I've never seen before, or some different fruit that I've never seen before at the market. Happened to me just the other day, actually. My wife wanted to buy this vegetable. And I was like, "I don't

know what that is. Let's try it out." You know, it's an adventure, let's give it a shot. So things like that always **keep you on your toes**, keep you interested, even though we may be less busy in terms of activities and a schedule that's not as jam-packed as we could back home.

Anna: Maybe it's also because I'm a bit older, as well. I have to say that obviously I've been living in Spain for nearly 5 years now, so I'm a little bit older than I was before. So obviously my priorities changed a little bit. But I have had some other interesting experiences like, well, interesting bad ones as well, but funny ones, really, when you think about it. I mean, I've cried after being frustrated after going to do different things in terms of bureaucracy. And, you know, I remember with trying to sort out something to do with my tax situation, you know, I had a horrible experience and I left there crying. I mean, it was really embarrassing, actually. But you know, I was absolutely bawling, because I was so frustrated about what happened.

And you know, it's not all fun and games. I think a lot of people think living in Spain is like going to the beach, and you know, living on the beach, and, you know, kind of drinking sangria. But actually, it's not quite like that for everybody. So, I think there's kind of this idealistic picture of what maybe living in Spain or other countries would be like. I'm trying to think of what I would think about living in Korea, I kind of imagine, this is what I imagine, OK. I don't know.

Andrew: OK, I'll let you know if it's accurate or not.

Anna: I imagine it being very busy and full of people like very, like intense, like, kind of like fast paced. And I imagine, like, lots of like, small cafés and bars. And people kind of in, in the cafés and bars. And yeah, I don't know, that's kind of how I envisage it. Like, very busy, very fast paced, but kind of quiet. That people that are, like very, you know, small social circles, that type of thing. And lots of cool things, gadgets, technology, cat cafés. Is that a thing? Is that, because I don't know if that's a Japanese thing, because I don't want to confuse Japan and Korea, because that's not correct. But I know cat cafés is just one of those things that always jumps into my mind.

Andrew: Yeah, there definitely are cat cafés, dog cafés, I think there are even some specialty cafés for raccoons and different animals, even. There are places, you know, like, so many Koreans, and I think they do have these in Japan as well, as far as I know, there are a lot of different specialty, niche cafés. So now I think maybe it's changing a little bit, pet ownership in Korea is becoming more accepted and more popular. And it's actually very popular these days to own a pet dog or cat. But before it wasn't as popular, but animal lovers would still like to spend some time with a dog or cat. So you could go to a

café and drink coffee and there'll be some cats living in the café that you could, you know, spend some time with. So definitely that kind of place exists, for sure.

Anna: OK. Just to kind of like sum up kind of what I've said, I think there are a lot of highs and lows living abroad. For me, I think the highs outweigh the lows. And I would really encourage, maybe if you're listening and you're thinking about, you know, maybe, do I take the jump? Do I do it? Do I live abroad or try and live abroad? I think I would always encourage people to give it a go, you never know what's going to happen. And I remember that I always thought when I was kind of at my point, where deciding whether to move to another country or not, I was like, look, if I go and I don't like it, I can always come back.

Like there's always another option, I can always come back to my home country, and try and, you know, start again or whatever. But if I don't go, I'll never know what it could have been like. And for me, that was too much of a kind of push to make me do it. So I think if you're kind of **on the fence** and you're thinking, do I do it or not, I would always encourage you to think why not? You might regret it if you didn't try it. It's not for everyone. So you might go and absolutely hate living in another country. And you might hate having to do all these administrative things that we've been talking about. And it might be really stressful and horrible. But I would always encourage people to try it and see what happens because for me, it's been a really rewarding experience overall.

Andrew: Yeah, I completely agree with you. I think it's something that everybody should try if they have the opportunity. There have been many people that I've known here in Korea, as working as an English teacher, that have, you know, come over and taught for a year, and then they went home right away. They're like, this isn't for me, I don't really like this. That happens a lot. But then there are many friends and colleagues that I have that have been living abroad here in Korea for 20 years, 25 years, 30 years. You know, people do come here and stay for a long time as well. So everybody is different.

But for me, I like that I can wake up in the morning and I don't know exactly how the day's going to end. Now my life has stabilized a lot as I've gotten older, Anna, so I kind of agree with you there. But what I mean by that is like it's still foreign enough for me that it's like a little bit chaotic and I'm not exactly sure what's going to happen in every situation still. You know, the more time I do spend here, the better I get at Korean, a little bit of this romance has kind of vanished, which is natural and to be expected but also a little bit sad because I really liked like my early days here in the country when I didn't understand what anybody was saying, and I didn't know, you know, I'd get on a bus, I'm like, I'm not exactly sure where this bus is going, let's find out. You know, that kind of adventure was really awesome. Unfortunately, these days, you know, I know how to read the bus map that's posted to the side of the wall so I can see where it's going. And I know where all the

places are, I know the place names. So, you know, that kind of experience disappears the longer you spend in a different country. But, yeah, there's still a little bit of that spark remaining and that's what makes living abroad so fun.

Anna: Absolutely. And you still got to work. Like, I always say to people, like, I think, you know, even if I live in another country, I'm still working, but it just feels nicer for me working somewhere that's not where I'm from. So, for me, it's definitely worth it. But, again, I would also just, like, as a final comment, I'd just like to say that even if you move abroad and it's not for you, that doesn't make you any less of a person. Like, I think that some people feel like, oh, people who live abroad are like, you know ... I know because I have a friend, for example. And she's like, "I would never live abroad, Anna, it's just not for me." I'm, like, yeah that's fine. It's just not for everybody. It doesn't matter if you like it or not, if you don't like it, and you want to stay in your own country, perfect. Like, I think there's kind of this thing that people feel like they have to do it or it's a sign of something. But I mean, it's just, it depends on who you are and your personality. But if you're **on the fence** and you're thinking about doing it, I would say do it. Why not?

Andrew: Yeah, **YOLO**, right? You only live once, give it a shot. And you can always go back home.

Anna, I think we will wrap it up here. So I want to say thanks to everybody for listening. And, guys, congratulations on getting some English listening practice in. That's what we're here for, to help you with your English listening and you've done a great job today. So you've heard what Anna and I have had to say about our experiences living abroad as foreigners. And now we'd love to hear what you have to say. Perhaps you've had a similar experience yourself. Or perhaps you have a question that you'd like to ask us about our experience. Whatever it is, don't be shy. We love hearing from you.

Anna: Absolutely. Please let us know what you have to say and leave us a comment. Or you can post on the discussion forum on our website. And if you really liked Culips, please support us. And there are many ways that you can do that. You could tell your friends who are learning English to check us out. Or you could follow us on Instagram. You just have to search for Culips English in Instagram and you'll be able to find us. You could also subscribe to Culips on your favourite podcast app and leave us a positive review, of course. And, finally, you could become a Culips Member. And for all the information about these awesome benefits you get when you're a member, just check out Culips.com. And we'll be back for another episode very soon and we'll talk to you all again then. Bye.

Andrew: Goodbye, everybody.

Detailed Explanations

Red tape Idiom

Red tape is a term we use to refer to official procedures, rules, and formalities that make things more difficult and time-consuming. In this episode, Andrew says that there's a lot of **red tape** in dealing with immigration. This means there're a lot of administrative things you have to do in order to get what you need.

The origin of this idiom dates back to the 16th century, when actual **red tape** was used for important documents to separate them from ordinary, less important ones.

We normally use this expression in a negative way, when talking about something complicated that takes a long time to do because of all the paperwork and bureaucracy.

Here are a couple more examples with **red tape**:

Diana: Hey, Kyle! How are things?

Kyle: Not bad, thanks. I've been promoted, actually.

Diana: That's great news! You don't seem to be so happy about it, though.

Kyle: Well, I was at first. But I didn't realize what it would be like. There's so much **red tape**! I have to deal with lots of paperwork, fill out lots of forms, sign lots of documents. It's so annoying.

Diana: Yeah, I'm not a big fan of all this bureaucracy myself.

Jacoby: What are you going to do now that you've graduated? Have you found a job?

Fiona: Actually, I was thinking about opening a restaurant. It's my childhood dream.

Jacoby: Yeah, but it's not that easy. There's a lot of **red tape**: you'll have to register your business, find a place, get the license, that kind of a thing.

Fiona: I know that. But I'm ready for a challenge!

To bend over backwards

Idiom, informal

To bend over backwards means to do as much as you can in order to help someone or to achieve something. When someone **bends over backwards** to do something, they work very hard trying to make it happen. Sometimes it means doing more than expected and trying extremely hard to accomplish something.

In this episode, Andrew talks about retail staff **bending over backwards** to make sure customers are happy. This means staff do everything they can to keep their customers. On the other hand, immigration office workers don't **bend over backwards** for their clients, because they aren't worried about losing them.

Here are a couple more examples with **to bend over backwards**:

Meghan: How was your business trip?

Rodrigo: It was pretty good! Our partners organized everything, from airport transfer to accommodation. They took us out to a fancy restaurant and showed us around the city. We didn't expect so much attention, to be honest! It was nice.

Meghan: Wow, I can see they really **bent over backwards** to make sure you had a good time.

Rodrigo: They sure did!

Lila: How is your dissertation going?

Nermin: It's going great, I've finished the second chapter. I have to say, my mentor is so helpful! He's been **bending over backwards** to help me with any problems I've had. He is always there for me when I need him.

Lila: Wow. You're so lucky. My mentor barely answers my emails. She's always busy anytime I try to meet with her.

Nermin: Maybe you can still find someone else? You should call the office and ask them.

A loophole

Noun

A loophole means a way to avoid following a rule or a law. In this episode, Andrew talks about his last time visiting the immigration office. He says that there was **a loophole** with the appointment system. He means there was a way for some people to avoid having to follow the rule of making an appointment in advance.

If there's **a loophole** in a legal document or a rule, it means there's an error in it that makes it possible to find a way around following it. For example, if you managed to avoid paying taxes, you found **a loophole** in a tax law.

Here are a couple more examples with **a loophole**:

Nirat: Rachel, can I talk to you for a minute?

Rachel: Sure. I'm just unpacking here.

Nirat: Wow, you brought so many clothes! How did you even manage to do that? Aren't you only allowed one carry-on bag?

Rachel: That's right. But I found **a loophole**. Nobody said you couldn't bring a pillow on the plane with you. So I just put all my extra clothes in a pillow case!

Nirat: That's genius!

Jelena: Wait, whose car is parked in your driveway?

Hidir: I have no idea.

Jelena: But they can't park here. It's your property! We have to do something.

Hidir: Believe me, I tried. Apparently, there's this **loophole** that means it's not illegal to park your car in someone else's driveway. The police can't do anything about it.

Jelena: This is so unfair. I'm going to go leave a note on that car.

To keep [someone] on [their] toes

Idiom

In this episode, Andrew talks about encountering new things, like food, in a foreign country. He says that things like that **keep you on your toes**. He means things like that keep you interested and aware of what's happening around you, and turn your life into an adventure.

When something **keeps you on your toes**, it helps you to stay active, focused, and quick to react. Imagine actually standing on your toes, as if you're prepared to take an action any minute. That's where this idiomatic expression originates from.

Here are a couple more examples with **to keep [someone] on [their] toes**:

Yin: How old did you say your son is?

Will: He's 2 years old. Honestly, I thought it was hard when he was just born. But it's even more challenging now! He's running around, always trying to grab something, climb somewhere. We never know what he'll be up to next!

Yin: Sounds like he **keeps you on your toes**!

Will: Yeah, you have to be prepared for anything when you have a little one.

Arif: My sister told me you're married now.

Carole: Yes, I got married last year.

Arif: Congratulations! So, what does your husband do?

Carole: He's a substitute teacher. He works in about 20 different schools. Sometimes he has to teach an entire class, other times it's individual lessons. Every day is something different.

Arif: That sounds stressful!

Carole: It is, but he likes it. He says it **keeps him on his toes**.

To be on the fence

Idiom

To be on the fence means to be undecided or unable to make a choice. In this episode, Anna talks about **being on the fence** when thinking about moving abroad. **Being on the fence** in this example means being unable to decide whether or not you should move abroad.

When someone **is on the fence**, they're not sure whether or not to do something, or can't choose exactly what to do. For example, if you can't choose a major at university, you're **on the fence** about it.

We talk more about this idiomatic expression in Catch Word #197. Check it out to learn more.

Here are a couple more examples with **to be on the fence**:

Shoichi: Have you found a new manager yet?

Alia: I'm working on it. I've been interviewing candidates for a week and I have two potential candidates. One of them is better qualified, but the other one has more experience. I'm still **on the fence**.

Shoichi: Would you send me their resumes? I'd like to take a look.

Alia: Sure, I'll do that right now.

Walt: Are you going to apply for a summer program?

Anke: I'm **on the fence**. On the one hand, I'll have a better chance of getting into college. On the other hand, it's quite expensive. I'm not sure if I should do it.

Walt: I see. Maybe you could find a part-time job? I'm planning on working in my dad's shop after class.

Anke: That sounds like a good idea! That way I might be able to afford it. Thank you!

YOLO

Acronym, informal

In this episode, Anna says that if you're thinking about living abroad, you should do it. In response to this, Andrew says, "**YOLO**, right?" **YOLO** is an acronym for **you only live once**. It means you only get one life, so you should seize the day, take risks, and do exciting things. In other words, Andrew means that you should try living abroad, because you should experience different things and live your life to the fullest.

This slang expression is mostly used on social media, but you might hear it in spoken English as well. It's usually said to encourage someone to do something or to justify someone's actions.

Here are a couple more examples with **YOLO**:

Ai: Look, you have to choose a college. All your friends already know where they're going after school.

Tony: I don't know, Mom. I was actually thinking about going backpacking. I want to see the world, experience life, and then, maybe, think about college.

Ai: What? I think you have to start taking your life more seriously.

Tony: Come on! **YOLO!** Life's short, we have to do things we enjoy!

Leo: I've got some news!

Amita: What happened?

Leo: I've been thinking, and I realized that my life isn't exactly what I want it to be. So I decided to quit my office job and become a writer. I've always wanted to do this; writing is something I truly enjoy.

Amita: Then I'd say, do it! **YOLO! You only live once.**

Leo: Exactly! You have to follow your dreams and take risks!

Quiz

1. What expression do we use to refer to a lot of paperwork and bureaucracy?

- a) rat ape
- b) read type
- c) red tape
- d) red tap

2. If someone bends over backwards, they _____.

- a) do something over and over again
- b) do something wrong
- c) don't try hard enough
- d) do all they can to make something happen

3. True or false? If there's a loophole in a rule, there's a way to avoid following this rule.

- a) true
- b) false

4. If something helps you stay focused, active and alert, it _____.

- a) holds you by your tail
- b) keeps you on your toes
- c) brings you on your heels
- d) puts you on your feet

5. If you can't make a decision or a choice, you're _____.

- a) up the fence
- b) over the fence
- c) on the fence
- d) at the fence

Writing and Discussion Questions

1. If you could live in any foreign country, where would you like to live? Why?
2. Describe a time when you had to deal with red tape. What happened? How did you feel?
3. Have you ever found a loophole in a rule or a law? What happened?
4. Can you think of anything or anyone that would keep you on your toes?
5. Describe a time when you were on the fence. What decision were you trying to make?

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.d 3.a 4.b 5.c

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