A new journey, a new chapter in my life....
A guest article by Mariska Kesteloo

MPI’s Mariska Kesteloo is leaving Europe and the low countries behind for a new adventure in Houston, Texas. In the middle of settling both into her new home and her new cowboy outfits, she found the time to write us a letter of goodbye. Show those Americans how it’s done Mariska, and we hope to see you soon!

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Finally, after 9 years of searching, waiting, trying, lots of patience and emotions, my dream is coming true. I’m moving abroad, yes, I’m Dutch and I was already living in Belgium for 9 years, which is actually also abroad but this is something different. The land where your dreams come true, the land of endless options and possibilities, and also a destination with many contradictions, America!

Actually I was aiming for Asia and suddenly this destinations pops up: Houston, Texas. To be honest, this one was not on my bucket list! But at the same time I started connecting the dots. The meetings & events industry is huge in the US, being involved in MPI [Meetings Professional International] for more than 5 years, and moreover influencer marketing is two steps ahead of Europe here... mmm. This is the moment where all the pieces seem to fit into place. Let’s do it!

To be honest, I’m not going alone. I’m married with a Belgian guy I found in a cozy bar in Ghent, who has been my husband for the last five years.

Houston, we had a problem. Moving abroad sounds very exciting for a lot of people and it really is a true adventure, but don’t underestimate the hassle and the work behind it all. The time and energy you need to put in to leave your country is extraordinary. Delays with our visas, our renters cancelling the day they should have moved into our house, the search for a cozy place for our cat and of course the paperwork for all the Belgian institutions, companies etc. (if someone is looking for an untapped market: digitalisation in insurances! I will immediately become your client).

It’s Wednesday morning and I’m writing this blog from my new place. After spending a week in the hotel, we finally moved into our apartment. Sounds simple, does it not? The apartment was empty and we had to buy everything. Where do you find what? Differences in culture, style and prices. We quickly became close friends with the local IKEA store, and after 4 visits we got the basics. Luckily we also got local support from the Dutch community, and with 2 loaded Texas Trucks our apartment was filled in no time with everything we needed.

In the meantime, I will continue my entrepreneurial journey with Word of MICE. Next week I will attend my first event of MPI Houston. I’m so curious to see how they manage their events here! One thing I know, is they don’t have a lack of volunteers. My personal goal is to get my life sorted as soon as possible, and the
first and most important step in the process is to get my social security number. Without this number, you can’t open a bank account, get a credit card or a local phone number, buy a car (very important here, no car = no life!) etc. This is a must. Second priority is of course expanding my company. My aim is to explore the options to open an office here! First things first.

Every day is a new adventure. This morning I wanted to go jogging outside, early of course, otherwise it’s too hot (31C and 95% humidity). Then I suddenly saw the sign pictured below. I thought it was a joke, than I spotted several others and thought: ‘don’t be better than the locals, nobody here is jogging outside, Mariska, be brave and let’s go inside for the first time!’

“In Europe we have around 1000 members, in the United States around 15000 members... in total 18000 members worldwide.

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