



International Adoption: The Whys and Hows ¹

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Many people in the United States choose to adopt children into their families. Over the last ten years, it has become very popular to internationally adopt. Although the international adoption process is complex, it is very rewarding for the new family.

Why Choose Adoption?

Different families choose adoption for different reasons. Some families are not able to have biological children. Other parents decide to add another child after they are finished having biological children. Parents that choose international adoption are typically married, middle-aged, middle-class, and have at least a high school education. Many adoptive families have someone who was previously adopted in their families (U of Minnesota, 2002). Just as there are a number of reasons why families choose to adopt, there are a number of resources to help parents decide what is best for them and their families.

Why Choose International Adoption?

The number of infants available for adoption internationally is far larger than the number available in the US. So, over the last 100 years, Americans have welcomed children from all over the world into

their families. In the past, Korea, areas of Eastern Europe, and Russia have sent children to the US for adoption. They are all countries that the US has a historical relationship with, such as US soldiers being stationed in Korea and in Eastern Europe (Simon and Alstein, 1987).

Other countries are sometimes unable to care for orphaned children within their communities. This is true today for many areas of Africa, Asia, and the Americas because of wars, poverty, and disease. International organizations often try to find ways to help children in their own country before making them available for international adoption. It is common for programs to begin with big plans for helping orphans, such as sending the children to school and providing health care (UNICEF, 2001). However, many of these programs end up not being able to truly help (Poulter & Sulwe, 1997). And even though international adoption is not exactly what some countries want for their children, it oftentimes is one of the few ways to give children in distress access to help and assure them their rights (Stark, 2003).

Over the next ten years, with the many epidemic diseases in Africa and Asia, there will be many more children in difficult situations and more orphans (Gregson, Garnett, & Anderson, 1994). American

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families sometimes see adopting internationally as a way for them to help other people and children.

In 1989, just over 8,000 orphaned children came to the US for adoption. However, by 2002, over 20,000 orphans were brought to the US through international adoptions. The chart below shows where internationally adopted children came from in 2002. Often the most internationally adopted children come from China, Russia, and the Americas. International adoption has grown in popularity and remains an important way families can add more children to their families.

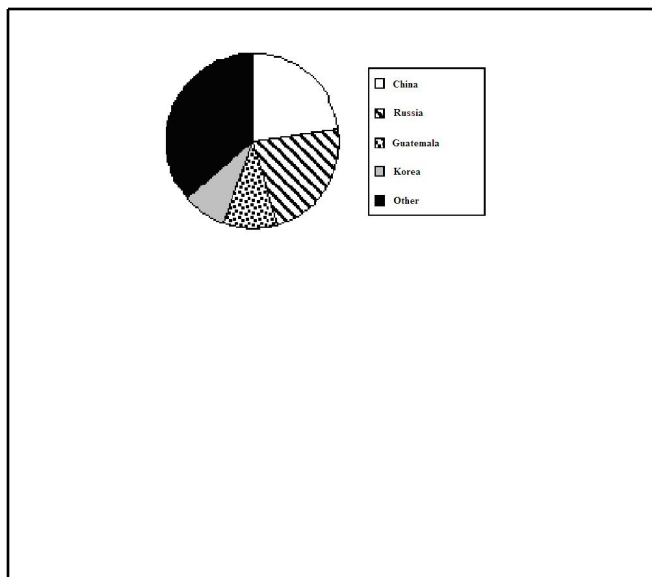


Figure 1. Children adopted internationally in the US during 2002 Credits: US Department of State, www.travel.state.gov

The Success of International Adoptions

How successful are international adoptions for the adopted child and family? This is a concern for many people wishing to adopt internationally. In general, children who have been internationally adopted do well. Even though the children are often from a different culture than their parents, they quickly bond with their new family. In school, children who have been internationally adopted tend to be among the highest achievers, and there are only a few who aren't involved in sports or activities outside of school (Simon and Alstein, 2000).

One of the biggest concerns for children who have been adopted internationally is how they come to see themselves. Families often try to bring parts of the child's native culture into the family, such as food and language. Children grow up seeing the world as a diverse place and generally do not wish to find their birth parents or return to their birth country (Simon and Alstein, 1992). Children who were adopted internationally seem to flourish in most adopted homes.

How to Adopt Internationally

There are several steps involved in adopting internationally. The first thing any family should do is research the process. This can be done at a local library or via the Internet. There is a list of resources at the end of this publication.

One place that exploration will surely take parents is to US government regulations. Because adopting internationally includes the US family and a child from abroad, there is a lot of information for families to collect. Here is a list of what documents adoptive parents need to gather:

- A completed orphan petition form.
- Form I-600, the Petition to Classify Orphan as an Immediate Relative.
- Proof of citizenship and/or marriage license of the petitioner.
- Proof of divorce, if necessary.
- Proof of all pre-adoption requirements from the receiving state and departing country.
- A favorable home study.
- The filing fee.
- Proof of the child's age and identity.
- Proof that the child is actually an orphan by the US government's definition of an orphan.
- Proof that if the child was also adopted in their native country that parents were present.

- Proof that there is someone acting for the parents to gain legal custody of the child.
- Any proof of a final adoption abroad, if necessary. (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2000).

The international adoption process is under review by the US government. Because of this, there is a new program for people wishing to adopt children from Sierra Leone, Poland, the Philippines, Haiti, and Honduras (Immigration and Naturalization Service, 2003). The goal of the new program is to make adoptions from those countries easier and faster.

Costs of Adopting Internationally

Families who wish to adopt internationally must consider several costs. Parents who are adopting internationally must pay all the fees for the paperwork to bring the child into the US. Also, families pay for a home study before the child may enter the US. Families are also responsible for all travel and legal fees abroad.

Many families seek the help of adoption specialists to adopt internationally. This aid includes lawyers, agencies, and other organizations in both the U.S and abroad.

Table 1.

INS/State Department Fees	Cost
Filing fee for forms	\$405
Filing fee for forms	\$125
Immigrant visa application fee	\$260
Immigrant visa insurance fee	\$60
Agency Fees	Cost
Various Services	\$10,000-\$30,000

Help For Families

There is plenty of help for parents who wish to internationally adopt. There are phone numbers, online websites, and addresses to contact adoption professionals. The information below will provide a starting point to your research.

◆ Financial Aid

National Adoption Foundation

Information can be found at:
<http://www.nacac.org/adoptionsubsidy.html>

◆ Florida

Florida's Adoption Information Center can provide assistance at 1-800-96-ADOPT (1-800-962-3678). The number works in Florida, Monday -Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Calls in English and Spanish are welcomed, and the Florida Relay Service answers calls from hearing impaired callers (State of Florida, 2003).

The website <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/adoption/> offers state-specific information as well.

◆ National Resources

The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse offers a wide range of information on international and domestic adoptions its website is <http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/>

◆ Legal Help

For legal help, you may find information at:

<http://dlis.dos.state.fl.us/fgils/adoption.html>

<http://www.floridabar.org/newflabar/consumerservices/General/Consumer.Pam/02PAMPH.HTM>

<http://www.adoptionattorneys.org>

◆ US Government

The US government also runs the Office of Children's Issues to help parents adopting internationally. You may contact them at: 1-888-407-4747 (8 a.m. - 8 p.m.) or (202) 736-9130

Office of Children's Issues

SA-29, 4th Floor

U.S. Department of State

Washington, DC 20520

http://www.travel.state.gov/family/family_1732.html

Forms for international adoption can be found at:
<http://www.bcis.gov>

With the right help, a child could be on his or her way to your family. Adoption makes the world a smaller place one child at a time.

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