



‘Everything at home seemed new to us’

On returning to live in Graz, Austria, HEINEKEN repat partner Gertraud Eregger couldn't help but notice how she and her husband's approach to parenting had been influenced by their time abroad.

Strangers at home

“When we repatriated, we often felt like strangers in our hometown. Everything seemed new to us. But, of course, we had changed too. When we left for Ethiopia in 2014, we were a young couple with no kids. On returning home from Jamaica, we were a family!” says Gertraud, who has a two-year-old daughter and another little girl on her way.

So, what's new?

“Many of our friends had also started families. At times it felt like we'd skipped a chapter of our lives and now we're all catching up! It was interesting to see how our time in Jamaica had influenced us as a family. In Jamaican culture, and also in many central and south American countries, there is nothing wrong with children demanding attention. They can be loud and spirited, wherever they go. Our daughter isn't yet three but she's definitely an outspoken character! In Austria, however, kids are expected to 'always be well behaved, nice and mostly not loud' when in public.”

A stark contrast

“In Central and South America, it's amazing to see how people truly adore kids and always have a big smile on their face when they see a little one. We'd go for dinner and a waitress would happily volunteer to be a babysitter while my husband and I enjoyed a meal. It's a very genuine instinct. They just gravitate towards kids and interact with them. So it was very new to us, when coming back to Austria, to see that the worlds of kids and adults are quite separate. Trains with signs that read 'Quiet No Kids Zone' seemed so strange to us.”

The family DNA

With her second child on the way, Gertraud believes she and her husband's parenting style will always be influenced by their time abroad. “Inside the entrance of our house there's a world map and all around our house there are pictures and mementoes to remind us of Ethiopia and Jamaica. As a family, I also believe we will always embrace the idea of being global citizens – appreciating diversity, always wishing to meet new people and experience new cultures. I hope those values will be embedded in our children when they are older.”

Photo: Gertraud with her husband and daughter