

Running Away from Trump's America Is Complicated. I Should Know.

By Cara Hoffman, *The New York Times*, December 1st, 2024

There is a much-repeated cliché about people following the vagabond life. You are either running away from something or running toward something. But as all good vagabonds know, a destination is more than a point on a map. Those who profess they want to flee a Trump presidency, who see ruin on the horizon, would benefit from imagining what it is they *want* instead of reacting to what they *fear*.

The first time I left the United States with no return ticket, I was not yet an adult. I was disgusted by the increased power of the conservative agenda, including hostility to unions; and the burgeoning polarization of the culture wars. I quickly fell in with others who also had no desire to return to their homes. We saw worlds outside our home countries, fell in love, found places we'd dreamed of and did what it took to stay there. For me that place was Athens.

I returned to the United States in 1991. My next departure was after the first Trump victory in 2016. I didn't want to live in a nation capable of electing a Donald Trump, but it wasn't just him. I lived in part of the Lower East Side that eventually became gentrified beyond recognition. Every year I felt more certain that to succeed in an atomized consumer culture was to fail as a human being. This time, I wasn't leaving to escape. I knew what it was I wanted. And so I knew exactly where I would go.

We went back to Athens, settling for most of the year in a neighborhood with a strong cooperative spirit and tradition of protest. Thus we found community — close ties with friends and neighbors who are dedicated to maintaining and protecting a neighborhood where people of different ethnicities, classes and generations mix happily. But it's not for everyone. Protesters clash with the police and set cars on fire. Being there crystallized for me the life I was seeking, one of bravery and camaraderie.

It's impossible to predict how many people will voluntarily leave the United States because of Mr. Trump, although it's sure to be a small number. Few governments keep track of citizens who emigrate. But hints can be gleaned from other statistics.

In 2015, roughly 6,800 Americans applied for Canadian residence. After Mr. Trump's inauguration in 2017, that number jumped to over 9,000. Financial advisers and immigration experts are now anticipating a new surge of Americans leaving.

Would-be Trump ex-pats should be aware that in this age of social media and American cultural dominance, there is little way to avoid the United States. Mr. Trump's reach will go far beyond the borders of this nation. American culture is an ether that can't be contained.

There are two ways to leave Trump's America. Go abroad where you are needed, learn the language and help solve local problems by bringing an immigrant spirit of hard work. Or, stay home in the United States and put in the time to fix things, encouraging a spirit of mutual aid in towns and neighborhoods instead of contributing to polarization.

What I've learned from my travels and strategic exits from the United States is this: There is no escape from the world, just the need to build a better one.