

Customs Requirements Across the Globe: Simple Steps to Get it Right

“...I’m really sorry Mr Smith, your samurai sword is not allowed to be shipped to the UK...”

Most Global Mobility professionals reading this will probably repeat the above quotation at least a couple of times before it sinks in. “Senior Manager?” Bringing a Samurai Sword?” “Into the UK?” And quite rightly. It’s not the kind of detailed on-the-ground discussion that we in Global Mobility hear very often.

However, the above snippet from a conversation between one of our relocation coordinators and a VIP assignee is an appropriate reminder to us all about one of the most important areas of any international relocation: customs regulations in the host country.

Process Explained

All international removals (excluding intra EU moves) are subject to customs clearance formalities on arrival at destination port, whether that arrival is at sea, airport, cargo terminal or border crossing.

Every country has the right to examine such unaccompanied household goods and effects before granting clearance and release. And every country has different customs requirements and expectations for unaccompanied household goods and effects.

Real Examples

In Russia, pre-1950 items have to be registered with authorities otherwise they cannot be re-exported when you leave; in Nigeria, items that are less than six months old cannot be taken into the country; in some Middle Eastern countries there are restrictions on religious items or films containing nudity; in Saudi Arabia, you cannot import equipment capable of sending or receiving radio signal. And so the list goes on - in China regulations are regionalised, meaning something acceptable in Beijing may not be authorised in Chengdu.

Implications Of Getting It Wrong

Ignoring the different regulations, or not understanding them, can have serious cost and service implications, as follows:

- **Re-Shipping Costs:** if, for example, a piano with ivory keys hasn’t been granted a CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora)

certificate in advance of the move, then the destination country can refuse entry and the item will need to be returned to its country of origin until the certificate is granted

- **Demurrage Costs:** the charge from the shipping line for delayed operations of loading/unloading at airport / sea port
- **Customs Duties:** Duty fees, varying from country to country, are applicable for items including cars, alcohol and perfume
- **Delivery Delays:** if items are held at port or returned to the origin country then this can delay delivery of the consignment.

Not to mention additional temporary accommodation costs caused by a delay to delivery of all / part shipment or indeed the risk that the assignee becomes dissatisfied or unproductive as they get embroiled in matters detracting from their core role.

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The Good News!

The good news is that with correct advice in advance and ongoing counselling during the packing process at origin, the cost and delay scenarios above are rare.

- The assignee should initially be provided with a customs regulation factsheet, containing all prohibited items, all restricted items, and all necessary documentation
- These requirements and restrictions should then be reinforced by a dedicated move manager verbally and in writing before and during the packing process
- The same move manager is available to answer any questions that the assignee and/or Mobility team have surrounding

the customs process

- Your dedicated mover’s packing leader should be aware of these same restrictions and report any discrepancies or potential issues with the goods they are packing to their office based move manager.

What Can Global Mobility Do?

Appointing a FIDI affiliate relocation provider is a good start. Preferably one that has achieved FAIMPLUS accreditation, the highest-level quality certification (audited by Ernst & Young) that can be achieved within the international moving industry.

Ensure appropriate restrictions are applied to both Global Mobility Policy and Moving Allowance to discourage movement of items liable for duty or likely to attract delay or refusal by customs officials.

Request via SLA that your appointed mover has the latest customs guidance and is applying this guidance to every move they undertake on your behalf.

Request via SLA that your appointed mover immediately reports, during the packing process, any items that are outside of allowance or categorised as prohibited or restricted on FIDI’s customs guidance.



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Tim has been at DT Moving for almost eight years, helping HR and Mobility teams meet their corporate relocation goals. DT Moving is a long-established relocation company, with a group presence of 51 offices across 34 countries.

If you have any questions relating to any of the above or would like to discuss your moving / relocation programme, please do not hesitate to contact Tim for any advice. t.daniells@dtmoving.com