



DALE ALSTRUP

FOREIGN SERVICE IT PROFESSIONAL,
HAVANA

Dale Alstrup never planned to work abroad, but one quick trip to a mission and he was bitten.

I joined the department in 2001 after graduating with honours from an IT program at Algonquin College. I was hired for a term contract initially, but eventually secured an indeterminate position through a competition with Secure Systems Development (AITC). Although the work I was doing involved frequent contact with IT professionals at missions around the world, I had no desire to work outside of Canada. After being the technical lead on a major project, I was sent to Athens to install the first device. Once I stepped inside that embassy, everything changed. I knew I wanted to work abroad. From there, it was off to London, Osaka, Tokyo, Caracas, Georgetown, Havana, and Port-au-Prince for other installations. For someone who had grown up in Nova Scotia and never travelled outside of North America, learning about those

countries and meeting the people was completely refreshing. I loved it and I wanted more. There was only one solution: I wanted to become what is known as “rotational.” I was preparing to return to Ottawa from Guyana when a poster that simply called out to me was published. It identified an opportunity to deploy from non-rotational to rotational. As they say, the rest is history.

The training program to become a Foreign Service information technology professional was intense, but I really enjoyed it. I took in massive amounts of information in a relatively short time, and then I was off to Havana for my first posting. Thankfully, there have only been a few major problems since I arrived. On one occasion, our OCTEL system died and we didn’t have the spare part. I ended up flying to Mexico and back in one day to pick it up. I left at 2:30 a.m. and didn’t get home until after 8 p.m. that day, when the problem was finally resolved. I’m still on the upswing of a learning curve but I think I’m doing okay.

Looking back, it would have been beneficial to go through the different sections at headquarters to gain more hands-on experience before heading out on posting, but, in my opinion, I’m getting the best on-the-job training there is. And the support from Ottawa is tremendous—thanks guys. Outside of my regular duties, I have fixed

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our water treatment plant at the embassy twice, and have learned how to install satellite systems at staff quarters, for both TV and Internet. As head of the recreation committee, I also manage our “Polar Bar” every other Friday night. We usually have crowds of 150 to 200 drop by for burgers, refreshments and the occasional live band. I love the challenges and honestly look forward to coming to work each day.