

CHOOSING Between Domestic and International Adoption

By Nicole Witt, MBA

Once you've decided to adopt, the next decision is whether you are going to adopt domestically or internationally. This decision impacts who you hire as your home study provider, your agency and your attorney. Making this decision involves you and your partner asking yourselves some difficult questions. This takes soul-searching, brutal honesty and forthright communication as some of your answers may challenge long-held beliefs about your values.

The first questions relate to the child's age. How important is it to you to adopt a newborn? Are you comfortable adopting a child who has been in group care for the first few months/years of his or her life? Domestic adoption is the only way to adopt a newborn. If you choose to adopt internationally, it means adopting an older infant or toddler.

Secondly is timeframe. Although you're anxious to grow your family, how critical is the speed of the adoption? With domestic adoption, although you do have more control over the timeframe than most people think, it is still unpredictable because it depends on when you are chosen by a prospective birthmother and how far along in the pregnancy she is. Nevertheless, depending on the quality of your profile, the visibility of your profile, your openness to different situations and the professionals with whom you work, many domestic adoptions can be completed in only a few months. Alternately, international adoption is a little bit more predictable, although not nearly as predictable as people tend to think. Changes in laws, political and economic climates and even general sentiment towards the U.S. can and do impact timelines — even once you are “in process.”

Another factor to consider is the medical and social history of the birth families. With domestic adoption, often this information is extensive, at least on the birthmother's side. Take some time to consider the medical and social history of you, your spouse and your families. Think about what that would look

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like on paper — would you select yourselves if the situation were reversed? With international adoption, you have the advantage of medical reports on the child him/herself but rarely any information on family history.

How about the level of openness with which you'd be comfortable? Many pre-adoptive parents choose international adoption because they do not want any contact with the birth family. Most domestic adoptions these days are semi-open, meaning that the birthmother will know your first names. In many cases, all parties have met and/or had phone conversations prior to the birth. After the birth, the adoptive parents send updates and pictures to the agency, which the agency then forwards to the birthmother. Contrary to popular opinion, these updates don't make the birthmother suddenly want to parent the child. Instead, they help reassure her that she made the right decision, that she is a good person (despite lots of people telling her how selfish she is during the process), the baby is thriving and, therefore, will not grow up to hate her (one of her biggest fears).

Next come finances. Neither domestic nor international adoption is necessarily more or less expensive than the other; it all depends on the particular situation. Domestically, one can expect to spend between \$20,000 and \$35,000. Internationally, costs vary by country and range between \$15,000 and \$50,000. The total amount spent and when the payments are due are less predictable with domestic adoption than with international. Also, money is at risk in either process — domestically via paid birthmother expenses and legal fees in a failed adoption and, internationally, if a country closes or significantly slows down once you're in the adoption process.

Next let's discuss the process. International adoption involves a traditional waiting list. Once you are on the list, you wait as you

rise to the top. With domestic adoption, you create a “personal profile” shown to prospective birthmothers until one selects you, which can happen at any time. You can increase the chances of getting selected quickly by creating a powerful profile and making sure that it has as much exposure as possible through a carefully selected network of adoption agencies and attorneys. Which route feels more comfortable to you is merely personal preference.

Another key area is concerns about the birthmother. Most people just beginning a domestic adoption have a fear of the birthmother “showing up on their doorstep.” In a closed or semi-open adoption, the birthmother will not know where your doorstep is. Even if she found your doorstep, she would have no legal right to the baby once her rights are properly terminated. Most importantly, most birthmothers are at peace with their decision and have no intention of disrupting the baby's life. Nevertheless, this fear often drives couples towards international adoption where these concerns, for the most part, do not exist.

Finally, demographics. How old are you? What is your marital status? Most people who adopt are between 30 and 45. Domestically, how young you look and how active you are is usually more important to the birthmother than your actual age. Internationally, your age may limit the countries for which you are eligible. Many countries have outright age limits and some limit the age difference that can exist between adopter and adoptee, thereby allowing older parents to adopt only older children. Additionally, some countries' eligibility requirements specify that the adoptive parents have been married for a certain amount of time or limit the number of prior divorces allowed.

There are many important considerations that

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go into this decision. Being completely honest with yourself and your partner is critical. Make sure you consider all the implications of the path you choose. Be careful not to let fear and myths lead you astray. Get the facts and, based on those, make the decision that's right for you, your family, and your forever child. †

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What's Your Preference? DOMESTIC OR INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

"My husband and I decided on domestic adoption because the doors seemed more open to us. With international adoption, we would have been up against more restrictions, more limitations, higher costs, and longer wait times." ~ KAREN, FL

"We made our decision to adopt internationally in part because of the stories we had heard about domestic plans 'falling through.' In addition, we were so moved by every story we read regarding the power of love reaching across the globe. We embraced the idea of this global unity and the common bond that unites us all."

~ LISA AND KEVIN, GA

"We started with international adoption but later changed our minds. We did not qualify for many countries and could not afford to be out of work too long [for the time required to travel to] another country. We also wanted an infant and initially did not [pursue] domestic [adoption] because of the wait times we heard of and the fear that because of our age we would not be picked – both of which turned out to be unfounded."

~ DANA & TRISH, FL

"We decided to adopt internationally due to the fact that Ed is Armenian and we could adopt a child from his heritage." ~ MARY JO & ED, NY

"We felt more comfortable with international adoption, because we would be ensured of no contact with the birthparents. We had friends who adopted from Korea, and they were very satisfied with their experience. We used their agency and now have two wonderful happy, healthy boys."

~ ANNE AND MICHAEL, NY

"With so many unplanned pregnancies in the United States, choosing domestic adoption was easy for us. We knew we wanted to do what we could for the birth mothers and families closest to us." ~ AMBER AND KEVIN, FL

"Ultimately, it was not a decision for international adoption as much as it was against domestic adoption due to the [approximately two day] waiting period [before the consent forms are signed] during which the birth parents could change their mind about their plan. This would have been too devastating after multiple miscarriages." ~ DAWN & NIEL, GA

"My wife and I had always known we would adopt a child and we thought it would be an international adoption. After hearing about all the children that are in need domestically we felt in our hearts that God has placed us on the path to adopt domestically." ~ ERIC, MI