

An encyclopaedia of expat living

In French-speaking Switzerland, no expat's bookshelf should be complete without a copy of *Know-it-all passport*. It is required reading for new arrivals and old hands alike. Now in its 7th edition, it is the definitive guide to Geneva, Vaud and neighbouring regions of France. Join *Swiss News*, as we meet the book's creator, Lisa Cirieco-Ohlman.

By Matthew Beattie | Moving to a new country can be a daunting experience – especially if you are unfamiliar with the local language or culture. There is so much to do – find a home, maybe buy a car; organise schools if you have children – the list seems endless and it's hard to know how to begin.

Even relatively established and experienced expats can find that sometimes their new life in Switzerland, or neighbouring French border towns, might throw them the odd curved ball. So, where can they find information to help them?

Expat helping expats

Lisa Cirieco-Ohlman's excellent book, *Know-it-all passport*, is a great place to begin. With over 700 pages filled with helpful expat advice and tips, the book is also supported by a comprehensive website, www.knowitall.ch. American-born Cirieco-Ohlman first came to Switzerland at the tender age of nine, when her father's work for the World Health Organization required the family to relocate from the United States to Geneva.

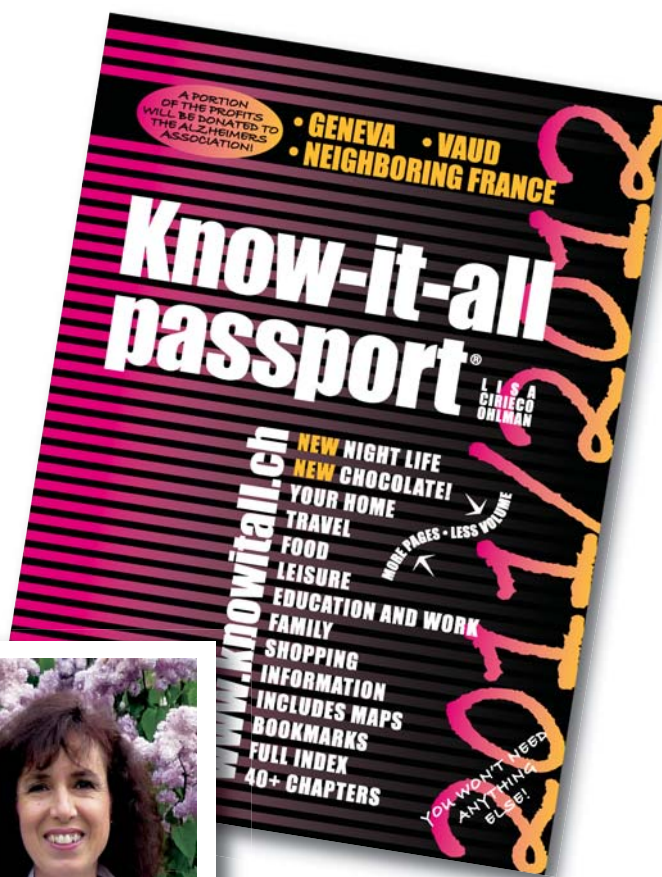
Now, 38 years later and still living in the region, few people better understand the benefits and challenges of expat life. *Swiss News* asked what inspired her to write the book.

"When my first two children were just babies, I was asked to do a talk for the American International Women's Club of Geneva on 'kids in Geneva,'" she explained. "I prepared a 17-page photocopied guide for this talk and spent weeks setting it up. It gave me real satisfaction. Unfortunately I put my phone number on the cover of it and was constantly getting phone calls. I patiently answered them, but put my foot down when one person called me at 10 o'clock one night demanding information. I realised that there wasn't a comprehensive guidebook in English for the area so I published *Know-it-all parents* in 1999.

"That first guide was only 160 pages long and I printed 1,000 copies. It sold out in three months. I made the second edition one year later – since which time, updates have followed every two years. For the 5th edition the name was changed to *Know-it-all passport* (as 70 per cent of the book was for all walks of life, not just parents)."

Growing readership

Since those early days, the popularity of *Know-it-all passport* has grown along with the wealth of information it provides.



Lisa Cirieco-Ohlman

From the initial 1,000 copies, nowadays around 6,000 copies are sold over the two-year period in which each edition is available. However, despite the growing popularity of her books, Cirieco-Ohlman has no plans to produce guides for other parts of Switzerland.

"Books covering other areas of Switzerland have already been written. What I think makes *Know-it-all passport* successful is that I am living and breathing it. I am deeply rooted, and all the entries or comments are coming straight from me or others living in the area – people who are willing to share addresses and information. This is a heart-felt guide, and I put every ounce of my energy into it."

Go on, be a know-it-all!

The newest (7th) edition of *Know-it-all passport* is available this month. Priced at SFr 38, with a portion of the profits going to the Alzheimer's Association, it is available from bookshops throughout the Geneva and Vaud regions.

For more information and helpful expat tips, visit the Know-it-all website: www.knowitall.ch