

Interview with Ms. Dawn Barriteau of Homeland Security Investigations

Ms. Barriteau is currently serving in Singapore as a regional defense attaché for the HSI. She has also worked in Los Angeles, and has conducted various capacity training programs in countries spanning throughout Europe, Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

1. In your time with Homeland Security Investigations, you've lived abroad in Southeast Asia, Africa, Latin America, and parts of Europe. Could you specify where exactly you've worked?

So I actually didn't live in these countries. I conducted capacity training programs there.

Specifically, I've done them in Tanzania, Botswana, Senegal, Morocco, Ghana, Qatar, the UAE, Peru, Colombia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, China, and Canada, as far as I can remember.

a. Approximately how long did you spend in each country?

For these programs, it was about one to two weeks. Singapore is my first real post abroad.

b. Do your investigations and objectives differ whilst being abroad versus working at home? If so, how?

Yes and no. We're a cross border focused agency, so we deal with customs and immigration laws. Overseas, our primary role is to develop relationships with foreign government law enforcement so that we are able to request assistance should we be carrying out an investigation. They can aid with providing things like financial transactions and driver's licenses, for example. It's really more of a behind the scenes, liaison role. We're trying to build trust. However, back at home, we have much more authority. We're able to carry our guns, and the work is much more hands-on.

c. Is it relatively common to serve overseas as an employee of the HSI?

It's not common. Agents generally travel quite a bit for investigations, but the HSI has about only 8 offices in 56 countries. For agents, tours last 3 years, with the option to extend for two more. There's not a lot of domestic moving either.

d. Do you have a favorite place you have worked in?

I did really enjoy my time in Tanzania and Colombia.

e. Through your travels, have you had to pick up foreign languages?

No, unfortunately I have not. We tend to hire local investigators overseas.

i. Would prospective employees with foreign language knowledge gain an advantage at employment in HSI?

I think it would be beneficial. I believe that employees with foreign language knowledge would be looked upon favorably by the HSI. For example, Spanish speakers in LA are definitely helpful given our proximity to the border, so conducting interviews and things like that in Spanish is easier. However, I must say that we don't value it to the extent of other governmental departments, notably such as the State Department.

2. Does the HSI collaborate with other governmental organizations/departments to obtain their goals? Can you describe the relationship?

Absolutely. Here in Singapore, we work with the State Department with a lot of things, given that our objectives and focuses are very similar. The State Department publishes a trafficking and persons report annually, and we help out with that. The State Department operates more on a policy perspective, and we operate more on an enforcement perspective. We also collaborate with other organizations, such as the FBI and the IRS. Singapore is a unique embassy due to the different working groups, so when an issue arises, we all sort of discuss how we can use our resources together or which department is best suited to tackle it.

3. In terms of education, is there any specific route/classes you believe would be beneficial in obtaining a job at Homeland Security?

Criminology and psychology are helpful, but really anything analytical is best. For example, criminal justice or accounting. Also, as we move into the digital age, computer science grows in demand, especially for things like the Dark Web.

4. Throughout your career, what have been your greatest struggles and your greatest successes?

Well really, solving cases that you've been working on, or just making progress on them is always a success. On the flip side however, cases can go on for years, which is discouraging at times.

- 5. What does job assignment look like at the HSI? Is it similar to the State Department, in that you sign up for certain jobs and move frequently?**

So it's not like the State Department. The majority of employees at the HSI are special agents. You start at an entry-level position, and you progress each year. Really, once you've chosen your track, there's no changing.

- 6. You've stated before that you've always wanted to be a federal agent. Why?**

I would describe myself as a rule follower, as someone always wanting to do the right thing. I really enjoy putting the puzzle together, and I feel like working as a federal agent best matches my interests and my personality.

- 7. Does the changing of parties in power in the US government affect your resources/job/objectives at all?**

You definitely feel it a little bit. Usually, funding and immigration are the two things that change the most.

- 8. You've mentioned that after Singapore, you will most likely return to LA to retire. Do you feel that you've had a fulfilling career with HSI?**

Definitely. I feel like with the HSI, I've been able to see the world and make it a safer place, so I would say I've had a fulfilling career.

- 9. Is there anything else you would like to inform students looking to pursue a career in Homeland Security about?**

Start reaching out to people to learn more about the field, and if you can, definitely try an internship. That way, you're able to see in a real life setting if this is really the path for you before delving in completely. And honestly, from what I've seen, most government employees are happy to talk about their experience, so give it a shot.

