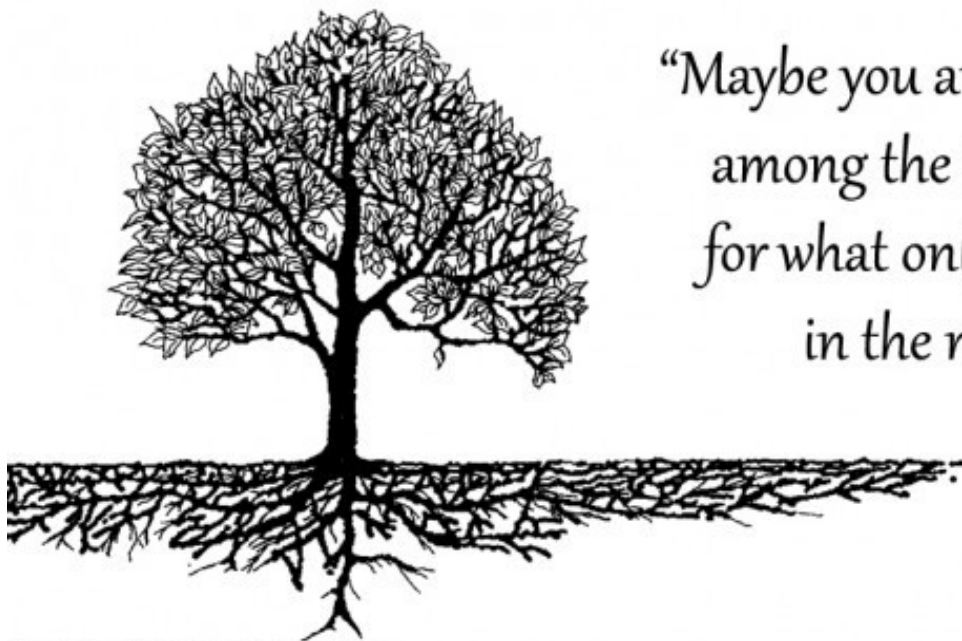


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# BEGINNERS SEARCH GUIDE

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*“Maybe you are searching  
among the branches,  
for what only appears  
in the roots.”*

*~ Rumi*

**What to consider when beginning to  
Search in InterCountry Adoption?**

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# Introduction

Searching for one's family of origin is time consuming and can be costly, especially considering in intercountry adoption contexts, you are needing to work across different legal frameworks i.e., different countries (country of birth and country of adoption).

Be prepared to expect the unexpected. Do your research and educate yourself as much as possible before beginning.

This manual is to assist those who have never considered searching and have little idea of where to begin. This document is a work in progress and is enabled by feedback by the intercountry adoptee community.

Provide your input at [contact@intercountryadopteevoices.com](mailto:contact@intercountryadopteevoices.com)



# Emotional Preparation for Searching

Adoptees have the desire to search for natural and various reasons. Before you launch into searching, it is a good idea to prepare yourself emotionally for the rollercoaster ride you are about to undertake. Searches can vary enormously in terms of outcomes - some adoptees find their families within a week or two, others try and retry and it can take years and years. Some adoptees never find anything. This leaves an adoptee with a multitude of impacts, which, if you haven't thought about before can hugely compound any other issues related to being abandoned/relinquished that may have lain dormant.

Here are a list of highly recommended suggestions you could try to prepare yourself for the journey that lies ahead should you wish to pursue searching for your original family.



## ■ Other Intercountry Adoptees

Make contact with other adoptees from your country of origin and other countries of origin and chat to them about what they went through in their search/reunification journey. There is an invaluable wealth of knowledge in the social media groups of adoptees.

Read [ICAV member's experiences](#) from 14 different sending countries to give you a good understanding of the breath of possibilities, the impacts & outcomes.

## ■ Professional Support

Seek professional support via a counsellor from a Post Adoption Support background. It can be so useful having someone who can listen and be there for you during this rollercoaster ride and help you to process some of the emotions that will inevitably arise as you go through the experience.

## ■ Mothers/Fathers (Parents) who have Relinquished/Lost their Children

If possible, join up to parents who have relinquished Forums/Groups and learn from them about what it is like from their perspective, keeping in mind, in intercountry adoption we usually are dealing with a totally different culture, language, and values.

## ■ Language

Given most of us intercountry adoptees have been adopted to a different country, it is

inevitable that if and when you find original family, you may not be able to communicate to them. So it could be beneficial for you to either start taking lessons to learn your original language or at least find a friend/colleague who has the language skills to assist, or consider engaging a translator whom you trust and who is sensitive to the issues in adoption.

## ■ Culture

If you have not travelled to your country of origin, take the time to learn as much as possible about the culture, values, religion, family values, and food as possible. Remember, if you are wanting and expecting to reunite with family one day, they will be totally different to you in the sense of their culture, their views of the world, expectations of how to behave as a family, and values. If you do not share language, it can be very easy to misunderstand one another.

Take time to immerse yourself in as much as you can about your country of origin before you meet them.

If it turns out that you don't get to meet them, you can still embrace your country of origin as a means of finding your identity and searching for who you are.

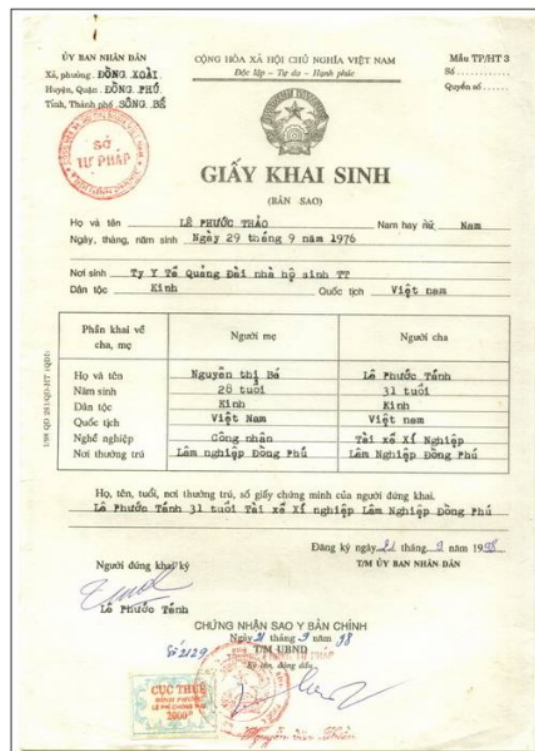
***Everyone has a right to  
know their origins!***

# Information Gathering / Documentation

Collect as much information about your relinquishment and adoption as possible. Various sources include:

- Letters between your adoptive parents and your country of origin
- Your identity details  
i.e. Original name, date of birth, place of birth, Town/Village/Province, Country, photos
- The orphanage or hospital
- Birth Certificate
- Adoption Agency
- Adoption Papers

Note: sometimes the legitimacy of some documents may be questionable but could still contain useful clues e.g. witness names.

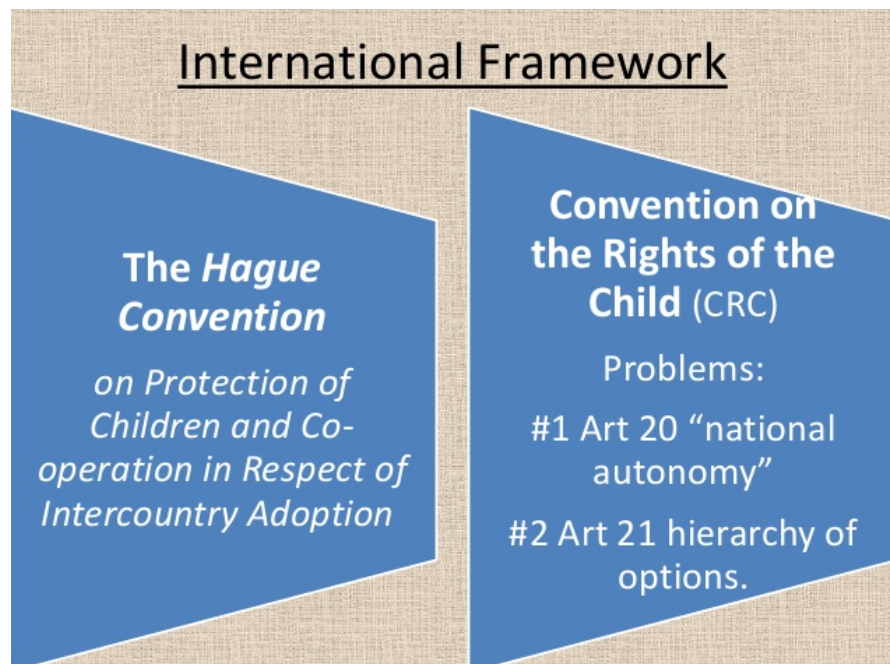


# What Adoption Process was Followed?

Your adoption usually would have been processed in both your country of origin and your receiving country via an organisation, today called a Central Authority or in times past, an adoption agency or private lawyer.

If you don't have a copy of your adoption papers from this organisation, contact them to obtain a copy.

Sometimes there is a fee to obtain this information, otherwise you could try under your receiving country's **Freedom of Information** option.



Note: some intercountry adoptee's have resorted to obtaining legal counsel when the documentation is being withheld. You can contact Against Child Trafficking if you wish to pursue this path to understand how to go about this.

The link below is the list of Hague Compliant Convention Countries and their Central Authority, which is a great starting place for where to go when requesting a copy of your adoption files.

Ask both your Adoptive Country and your Country of Origin's Central Authority for a copy of your adoption files.

<https://www.hcch.net/en/instruments/conventions/authorities1/?cid=69>

*Note: some countries have laws that prevent 3rd parties from obtaining this information on your behalf. e.g. India states only the person (adoptee) or adoption agency can request the adoption documents. You can however work around this by installing a Power of Attorney to act on your behalf.*

## Informal Search Options

Many adoptees have attempted informally themselves to search utilising modern technology and social media such as Facebook, newspaper advertisements and utilising TV search programs.

When using social media, your profile like Facebook provides the world with all your private information, unless you have security features switched on. You could be allowing access to information about yourself that you might not have wanted if you had used a mediation service.

An important issue to consider, is your original family's right to privacy about relinquishing you as a young person is being ignored and they might not have much emotional support and preparation prior to you contacting them. **Slow down, take time to think through these issues, seek professional counselling as support for yourself** before jumping ahead. Sometimes if things are rushed and people are pushed, you may be creating a dynamic that is not what you desire.

Obviously social media sources like Facebook gives you a sense of control over your search compared to engaging a search /reunion facility, not to mention the cost is free.



When utilising TV/Media as your search option, be aware most “journalists” or people running a TV search program have little to no understanding of the impacts relinquishment have on our original families, or the impact on us growing up adopted. They are not trained in providing formal mediation services nor do they have your rights or your original family's rights as key priority - ultimately they are running a TV show, a business where public ratings are their prime objective.

Think smart, don't sell yourself short, and demand things in exchange to meet you and your original family's needs eg. paid for trauma counselling for x number of sessions with a specialised counsellor, translation service for x timeframe after the “televised reunion”, travel & accommodation costs, etc.



## Requesting Formal Search Assistance

There are many agencies, organisations, independent private detectives who will facilitate an adoptee in searching for their original family. Some of them charge a fee for the service whereas others might be funded partially or fully to do this for you. Be sure you ask what their service costs and what they expect you to cover.

You will need to provide them with as much of your basic original identity details as possible.

Do not give them your original documents but only copies.

Essentially each organisation will have their own set of procedures to follow.



Ask what these procedures are to help facilitate the right kind of expectation in terms of timeframes, obstacles normally encountered, other organisations they liaise with and rely on during the process, whether they or you will need to travel, and of course, ask for estimate of costs based on the phases of search.

Think about how important it is for you to feel a sense of control over your searching process. Talk to the agency/contact about how they will communicate with you, how decisions will be discussed and made, and clarify what you expect. Trust and open communication is essential!

Adoptees typically experienced a sense of powerlessness in being relinquished and it's important not to become re-traumatised when engaging with organisations in situations where you can again feel powerless. Ensure you are seeking adequate emotional support from a variety of areas (eg adoptee network, immediate family, friends, church) whilst undertaking a search.

*Note: some countries of origin have laws that provide protection of identity of original families. It is a good idea to be familiar with whether this will apply to your situation.*

# DNA Testing to Search, Confirm & Validate

In today's era of modern technology an adoptee cannot be fully guaranteed a family is biologically related unless you confirm via a reputable DNA test.

There are many social media groups with DNA testing advice and experts. It's a good idea to join up to a few and familiarise yourself with the range of DNA tests and companies and gain an understanding of what results you are seeking so you know which test to pay for.



Some adoptees submit their DNA test results to a variety of companies and result databanks to enhance their chances of success in finding matches to biological relatives.

Some high level thoughts to consider as an intercountry adoptee before undertaking a DNA test:

- You may find distantly related people who want to establish contact and have an ongoing relationship - consider whether you are ready for this and what your expectations are.
- You may find your ethnic background is not quite what you expected.
- For those submitting DNA as a last resort because of a lack of documentation - be realistic in understanding the chances of having original family also submit their DNA to find a match. Usually what adoptees find are other adoptees who might be distantly related.
- You may want to consider “**what do these big companies do with your DNA data**”? Just because DNA testing provides a route for searching doesn't mean you should submit your DNA data to *any* company or any databank. For an excellent article that comprehensively discusses issues to consider, [here's](#) the best I've seen on this topic.

## Understanding DNA Testing

A useful and highly recommended place to begin to educate yourself about DNA testing is [here](#).

## Genetic Analysis Laboratory Choice

*FamilyTreeDNA*, *23andMe* and *AncestryDNA* are in English and based in the United States of America (Note: AncestryDNA is not available outside the USA).

What is the difference between these? Which is best?

Here is the most succinct [link](#) that compares these DNA tests and what they will provide. And another [link](#) that gives some good advice and looks at comparisons with what you get vs the cost.

In general, to simplify things, the recommended path for Intercountry Adoptees is:

1. Order & purchase FamilyFinder from *23andMe* or Family Finder from *FamilyTreeDNA*.
2. Once payment is made, the collection kit arrives home via the postal service or a transport company.
3. Take a sample closely following the recommendations attached to the kit. i.e. make sure it's before you eat or drink upon waking first thing in the morning. Make sure ID#s match and correctly labeled and write down these details somewhere safe, so you keep them for future reference.
4. According to the laboratory instructions, collect a little saliva or a few cells from the inside of the cheeks. These samples are painless and very simple to make at home.
5. Return post to the laboratory according to the instructions provided.
6. You will then be notified by email upon receipt of the collection kit and after analysis of results (several weeks from receipt of the kit).



## The DNA Results

If you want to compare your results with results from several databases to expand your avenues of finding matches, you can submit your data to [GEDmatch](#).

Here is a link that helps you upload your DNA data into GEDmatch: <https://www.yourdnaguide.com/upload-to-gedmatch/>

GEDmatch is a large database that is free and nonprofit. This website collects data from databases FamilyTreeDNA, 23andMe and AncestryDNA. To join, simply extract the "raw" data from FamilyTreeDNA, 23andMe and / or AncestryDNA and upload them GEDmatch (upload instructions are on the Internet).

It is possible to compare your DNA with that of persons from 3 databases and also do other matches with people in a different database than yours.

GEDmatch also offers a comparison of strong interest through the length of the DNA sequence of the longest (Largest cM), the total amount of common DNA (total cM), ... More figures are large and close, best c 'East.

## Conclusion

Whatever the result of your searching, whether that be searching for self identity or searching for original family, ICAV wishes you all the best and offers you adult intercountry adoptee mentors who have already travelled this journey and are able to walk along side to support where possible, as a peer. Contact ICAV via our [website](#).

We provide our [collation of experiences](#) as a valuable tool in preparation for this journey.