

Health Matters

Health Carousel International Nurses Bring Much-Needed Help to U.S.

(NAPS)—She had dreamed of this day for a decade.

As Diana Laura Lei De Leon walked into a Louisiana hospital last summer to begin as a nurse in the medical-surgical unit, she thought about the journey that had led her there, how right the move from the Philippines was for her family and how excited she was for the future.

“I’m so happy with my decision and hope my story inspires more nurses,” she said.

Most Americans have no idea about the path that brings desperately needed nurses to their bedsides from other countries. De Leon’s experience, challenging at times but ultimately triumphant, illustrates the journey of nurses who turn to experienced, ethical international healthcare staffing firms to navigate the complex process, as she did with [PassportUSA](#), part of Cincinnati-based [Health Carousel](#).

After earning her bachelor’s in nursing, De Leon worked in the Philippines for six years. But a U.S. hospital was always her goal. She has relatives here, including a nurse, and her grandma had visited the country many times.

“She told me stories about how wonderful it is and how respected nurses are here,” said De Leon, 28.

After doing research and talking with friends and family, she reached out to PassportUSA to begin the journey, which took several years. She never considered tackling it on her own.

“I knew it was overwhelming from friends doing it on their own,” De Leon said. “Plus, it was financially out of reach.”

The process could top \$20,000 USD for passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) exam; education evaluations; VisaScreen certification; training and licensing; travel and relocation costs; and countless other needs. Partnering with [PassportUSA](#) meant having a team to oversee every detail and shoulder the cost for her and most of the costs for her husband, Marvin Loyd Cabrestante, and 10-year-old daughter, Samantha, to immigrate with her. In exchange, she committed to a specified service period at the hospital.

It was the perfect solution.

“I filled out a form, and they called the next day. It was November 2017. I remember the day so clearly; it changed my life,” De Leon said.

She was assigned a team and received a contract to review.

“I read it carefully with my father and husband to understand all pros and cons. I asked my PassportUSA team many questions until I was satisfied,” she said.

Passing the IELTS exam was one of the first hurdles. De Leon wasn’t too worried, since her grandma had taught her English since childhood, but it was intimidating. The exam involved months of review coursework and hours of testing in listening, reading, writing and speaking. As a nurse, she needed to pass the tougher “academic English” exam and was tested on vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, conversational form and more. PassportUSA provided study materials, counseling and a review platform. Passing scores for each of the four parts vary by state, so she was grateful PassportUSA navigated requirements for all U.S. state boards of nursing.

More stressful was the NCLEX exam, which De Leon knew was ardu-



(From left) Diana Laura Lei De Leon, her husband Marvin Loyd Cabrestante and daughter Samantha are shown around their new hometown in Louisiana by her arrival ambassador Patrick Buclatin. De Leon and her family moved to the U.S. from the Philippines through a partnership with [PassportUSA](#) so that she could work as a nurse at a U.S. hospital.

ous. Again, she was grateful for assistance, review materials and emotional support from her team.

Most intimidating, she said, was the process to secure visas.

“But I didn’t feel lost, because I was guided all along,” she said. “They gave me checklists, helped me gather documents, handled details with my immigration attorney, prepared us for our interview at the embassy.”

De Leon asked her deployment adviser plenty of questions: Would her daughter need a car seat? How did she get a driver license? How were the schools? Which apartment would be a good fit?

The wait for visa approval seemed like a lifetime, and De Leon was scared, but her deployment adviser called frequently and served as a support system.

When approval came, “We all screamed in excitement.”

In the days leading up to relocation, her PassportUSA team answered questions, detailed the journey and shared travel arrangements.

After a long travel day, the family was greeted at the Georgia airport by their arrival coordinator, who shared a welcome packet and company gifts. He gave De Leon a cell phone and took the family to lunch; reviewed the company handbook and helped with insurance forms; and took them to the grocery and their hotel.

In the following days, he helped them open bank accounts, gave them a tour of the area and took them to see the hospital. De Leon also found a mentor in her arrival ambassador—a Filipino nurse who had immigrated through [Health Carousel’s PassportUSA](#) to work at the same hospital. De Leon now volunteers herself on the arrival team to help other nurses.

Nearly a year into their life in the U.S., it’s everything the family had dreamed. They love their community—family-friendly, welcoming and affordable. Samantha loves her school and friends, and De Leon is grateful her daughter will grow up in a country with so many opportunities. Marvin is taking coursework to become an engineer here. They purchased a car, their first, a huge milestone.

“We are so thankful and happy with our decision,” De Leon said. “We started with nothing, and even though we



Diana Laura Lei De Leon’s pride is evident as she prepares to start her first day as a nurse at a Louisiana hospital through her [PassportUSA](#) assignment. A nurse in her native Philippines, De Leon had dreamed for years of holding that role in the U.S.

had professional jobs in the Philippines, they didn’t pay enough for a decent life. PassportUSA believed in me and invested in my future, and now my family can spend the rest of our lives in our adopted country.”

Perhaps the nicest surprise for De Leon was how PassportUSA continues to care for her and her family. At least weekly, her PassportUSA supervisor checks in with her. He has helped her resolve snags in work relationships, put her in touch with other specialists when needed and provided direction on benefits and emotional support as she dealt with health issues. De Leon also takes comfort in knowing her PassportUSA clinical nurse support team is there whenever she needs anything—she’s not just on her own.

Because of the support she and her family continue to receive from her PassportUSA team, De Leon is able to throw her whole heart into caring for patients amid a pandemic that has challenged hospital systems nationwide.

“This is a calling for me, and I’m so proud I get to do this here. I’m fulfilling a goal I set as a teen—treat every patient with the care and respect my grandma received when she was sick.”