

FROM CORPORATE LIFE TO PENGUINS:

FINDING MY OWN PATH IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

By | JoJo Ward, RN spouse and founder of Happy Feet Private Tours

You often hear stories about the challenges facing partners during deployments or overseas assignments. For many families, those challenges are very real, and every experience is different. Mine, however, unfolded in a way I never expected.

After spending nearly 10 years with my husband away at sea while I lived in Portsmouth, we were suddenly given the opportunity to be together in the Falkland Islands (8000 miles away from the UK). When he was offered an overseas assignment, my first reaction was excitement, quickly followed by doubt, uncertainty, and worry. Like many couples facing an overseas posting, **the biggest question for me wasn't where we would live, but what I would do.** Partner employment is one of the most significant challenges families face when moving abroad. Leaving behind a secure corporate career was not a decision I took lightly. A few well-meaning friends even described it as "career suicide".

Before we moved, I imagined the Falklands as remote,

beautiful, and possibly isolating. I worried about giving up my professional identity, about whether I would find meaningful work, and whether I would feel fulfilled supporting my husband's Royal Navy career while putting my own ambitions on hold. I had worked hard to build my career, and the thought of stepping away from it felt risky and unsettling. The reality, however, turned out to be very different.

Shortly after arriving, I was fortunate enough to secure a role as a Penguin Warden at Bertha's Beach. It was a world away from my previous corporate life, but that was part of the appeal. Spending time outdoors, learning about wildlife conservation, and contributing to the protection of such an extraordinary environment was both grounding and inspiring. It reminded me that **careers don't always have to follow a straight line - sometimes the most rewarding opportunities come from stepping off a well-trodden path.**

When I updated my LinkedIn profile, one of my former bosses called me and asked, only half-joking, whether "penguin warden" was a real job. He ended the call by saying, "I think you have the best job title in the world." That simple conversation marked a turning point - a shift in how I measured success.

Immersed in penguin life, I found myself inspired in unexpected ways. I went on to write two children's books, *The Penguin Warden* and *The Perfect Stone*, prompted by the courtship rituals of penguins and my experiences on the beach. Both are now with a literary agent in London. Writing them was another way of processing this extraordinary environment and sharing it with others.

As my confidence grew, so did my curiosity about what else might be possible. The Falklands has a thriving tourism industry, and I found myself drawn to sharing its wildlife, landscapes, and stories with visitors. Watching people experience penguins up close - often for the first time - was





unforgettable opportunity to appear on *Pole to Pole with Jane McDonald* - another example of how unexpected doors can open when you say yes to new experiences.

Beyond that, it was often small, everyday moments that helped me connect locally. Our chocolate Labrador regularly visits the older people's home in Stanley, and accompanying him has given me a chance to spend time with residents, share conversations, and feel part of the wider community in a very simple, human way.

Overseas assignments aren't without their challenges, and they won't suit everyone. There are moments of homesickness, uncertainty, and adjustment. But for us, this move has been transformative. My husband has recently been extended here until October 2026, and what once felt daunting now feels like home.

incredible. Their reactions were pure joy, wonder, and excitement, and that feeling was contagious. Creating happiness through these experiences became something I deeply valued, and it naturally led me to consider how I could share the Falklands more widely.

What began as a quiet idea soon became a serious goal: setting up my own tour guide business.

Starting a business overseas was daunting. I completed an eight-week accreditation course with the Falkland Islands Tourism Board, navigated insurance, licensing, and regulations, completed a first aid course as part of operating safely and responsibly, and arranged my own self-employed visa - something I had to do independently, as military base exemptions don't extend to civilian businesses. There were moments of doubt and fear, but each step forward built confidence, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Today, I run my own tour guide company, **Happy Feet Private Tours**, combining my love of wildlife, storytelling, and people. **When I eventually gave up my role as Penguin Warden, I advertised for a replacement within the military community, and many military spouses applied - a powerful reminder that overseas postings don't just take opportunities away; they can also create them.**

Alongside building a business, community played a vital role in helping me truly settle. The Military Wives Choir was instrumental in that process, offering friendship, routine, and a sense of belonging. Being part of the choir even led to an



Military life isn't dull - it's what you make of it. I didn't expect this chapter to change me so deeply, but it has. I'm a better listener, colleague, wife, daughter, and friend. I've learned that **value isn't always measured by salary, and that growth doesn't always look like promotion.** Sometimes, growth looks like saying yes to the unknown - and discovering who you can become because of it.