

## **Tips for Avoiding a Culture Shocking Experience!**

Embarking upon a work or study abroad experience is an exciting opportunity. Though you may have your flight, accommodations, work or study abroad expectations and sight-seeing wish list in order, you may have not planned how to acclimate to your destination's culture. Here is a list of helpful hints to consider prior to reaching your host-country.

- Research your destination
  - Understand the culture and the norms
    - It's THEIR culture, not necessarily yours
    - Accept the differences
    - Research manners followed at your destination. For example, some body gestures may convey a message that is the opposite of what you intended.
- Keep an open mind
  - Prepare to be surprised!
  - Remember: Embrace the culture of your destination. Don't forget, you are a guest in another country. Exploring and acclimating to a new culture is potentially the most exciting part of studying/working abroad
- Be apolitical
  - Talking politics can ruin a trip
  - Talk to faculty, students, or alumni who have visited your country of interest to discuss the political climate and/or perceptions
  - An alternative is to remain silent when in political conversations
- You will likely experience:
  - Euphoria
  - Adrenaline rushes
  - Exhaustion
  - Irritability and anxiety

This is normal and it is transient. Stay up the first day and get on the local time schedule for meals, work, and sleep. Try to stay outdoors as much as is possible during the first day. If you must take a nap keep it short and as early in the day as possible.

- Very important things to consider:
  - Be open-minded to your destination's culture of work and lifestyle. Time management and lifestyle vary by country. For example, one country may live to work and another may work to live.
  - Be very cautious regarding gender relations. A lot of countries are radically different in that respect and breeching the locally accepted protocol is a serious cultural mistake and may even be very offensive.
  - In America we have a lot and expect a lot of space. Some countries do not. Be aware that you may have to alter your concept of personal space.
  - Walk, walk, walk! In other countries people walk everywhere. Do not underestimate the amount of steps you will be walking. Get, at minimum, one good pair of comfortable and waterproof shoes. When buying shoes walk in them while still in America; this ensures the shoes are comfortable and will increase your walking stamina.

- As you are a visitor in someone else's country please be aware that Americans may be perceived as:
  - Loud
  - Aggressive
  - Arrogant
  - Ignorant
  - Rude
  - Ethnocentric
  - Materialistic
  - Environmentally disrespectful
- Most of these perceptions stem from American media (movies, television shows, music, etc.) Whether these perceptions are true or not, here are some tips that will help you navigate this perceived reality
  - Be polite
  - Be quiet on public transportation
  - Be quiet period! Don't talk too loud.
  - Don't compare everything to the way it is in America.
  - TRY to speak the language. Know a few key phrases and use them.
  - Be very patient if another person does not speak English. They are most likely embarrassed by their lack of language proficiency.
  - Dress like a local. Standing out in a crowd is not only a bit arrogant, it's also potentially dangerous and can stir unwanted attention from thieves. Pay attention to your surroundings.
  - Listen with an open mind. Different cultures are different for many reason. Be curious but in no way judgmental
- Upon return to your country of your origin, you may also experience reverse-culture shock. [Reverse culture shock](#) is generally defined as emotional or psychological distress associated with reentry into your home country.

Reverse culture shock may result from returning to a country that may have changed from the time that you departed *or* you may have adapted to a new country and culture during the time you spent abroad.
- The [United States Department of State](#) offers the following tips to deal with reverse-culture shock:
  - [Expect](#) and prepare for disruption upon your return home.
  - Get closure by visiting your "must-see" list, taking photos and videos, saying goodbye to friends, buying souvenirs, host a "going away" party, and gain contact information for your new friends.
  - Prepare mentally and psychologically for your return. Click [here](#) for a series of self-reflection questions to consider prior to your return home.