



return

There's no doubt about it: you've changed. You spent an intense and wonderful time abroad, meeting new people, adapting to local customs, and being exposed to different ways of seeing the world. It has transformed how you think and who you are, maybe outside (with a new haircut or sense of style) and certainly inside.

That new you is returning home to meet old friends and familiar surroundings. You've probably imagined how it will be: telling stories, sharing photos, visiting favorite places. But once you get there, you may not feel as comfortable as you remember with your former habits, activities, or even friends and family. You may find yourself feeling homesick for your study abroad life, and its excitement of regular exposure to new discoveries.

It's enough of a phenomenon that educators have a term for it, "re-entry," and some practical tips for handling it. By integrating the person you have become abroad with the person you were before, you'll complete the transformation you began the moment you left.

<< ready for re-entry

prepare to re-enter

- reflect on your feelings about your study abroad experience and your return
- recognize the signs of reverse culture shock, and if you have them, take steps to re-acclimate yourself to your home surroundings
- approach your re-entry experience with the same open-mindedness and creativity you used while abroad
- set up everything to make sure your home campus is ready for your return
- tell employers all about your international skills and development
- turn your yearn to return into a positive addiction to international travel

readying to re-enter, reinvented



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Re-entry experiences are as different and unique as study abroad experiences. Some students return home and slip easily back into their school and family life. Others experience a degree of reverse culture shock, which can even bring depression-like symptoms lasting several days or several months. Preparing to return home, reflecting on your emotions, and recognizing signs of reverse culture shock will help you minimize it.

anticipating reverse culture shock

Once you've been home for a while, ask yourself if you've started to feel bored, frustrated, or sad. If so, it means that you're experiencing reverse culture shock, and you're not alone. This is a common phenomenon among returning study abroad students.

Like the culture shock you may have felt while studying abroad, reverse culture shock can follow a similar highs-and-lows pattern as you readjust to your surroundings. At first, it can be exciting to return to friends, family, favorite foods, and hangouts you missed. After a few days or weeks, though, you may start to feel frustrated that your friends are not as eager to hear your stories as you are to tell them. You may feel bored with the cafés and bars you frequented before you left. You may feel left out of new relationships that formed in your absence. You may have a hard time reconciling the person you became abroad with the person you were before. Some common signs of reverse culture shock are:

- frustration
- anxiousness
- boredom
- a sense of not belonging
- loneliness
- missing people and places from abroad
- need for excessive sleep
- feelings of alienation or withdrawal
- negativity towards American behavior
- disappointment or annoyance with family and friends

reversing the culture shock, reinventing yourself

Once you realize that reverse culture shock, whether mild or intense, is a natural and commonly-felt occurrence, you can start taking steps to reverse it. Don't suppress your feelings, but focus on how you can integrate the old and new you. And be patient. Significant growth like this doesn't happen overnight.

Give some of these ideas a try:

- seek out new places, people, and experiences
- stay connected to your study abroad friends
- find others who share similar experiences, such as study abroad alumni or international students
- use available study abroad and counseling services both at home and at school
- volunteer with local international service organizations, including your school's international student office or study abroad office
- learn whether your school hosts re-entry events
- continue studying your host language
- talk to a career counselor if you think your future goals may have changed
- reflect on what your experience has meant to you by writing, organizing a photo journal, or creating a scrapbook
- be as open-minded and creative during re-entry as you were while studying abroad

practical considerations

take care of business

Practical matters may not be the first thing on your mind, but you don't want to return home and find that you have no housing or financial aid, or that your graduation requirements haven't been fulfilled. It's your responsibility to make sure that all the plans you made before you left came to fruition:

- confirm your housing situation for your return to campus
- check that your financial aid status has not changed
- update your contact information with the registrar's office
- follow up on grade and/or credit transfers
- determine that the courses you took abroad fulfilled your home school requirements as planned
- ensure you are still on track with requirements for graduation
- learn about any new or changed school or department rules or procedures
- see a physician for a check-up, especially if you spent time in a developing country

make the most of your experience

One thing is for sure: during your time abroad, you gained significant skills and personal qualities that employers and graduate admissions officers value highly. When applying, make sure you emphasize them. Interviewers often ask about the study abroad experience you list on your résumé. If you only talk about the pubs and weekend travel, you miss a great opportunity to showcase yourself as a valuable, internationally-informed prospect. Instead, prepare a two-minute answer to that question. Get started with this list of characteristics that employers find important. While abroad, did you learn to:

- solve problems creatively?
- accept responsibility?
- communicate across cultures?
- learn quickly?
- take initiative and risks?
- achieve goals despite obstacles?
- handle difficulties and stress?
- manage, organize, and multi-task?
- adapt to new environments and negotiate transitions?
- learn through listening, observing, and making mistakes?

Did you demonstrate that you are self-reliant, persistent, flexible, adaptable, tolerant, open-minded, assertive, independent, a risk-taker, and/or appreciative of diversity? Be sure to think of anecdotes from your time abroad that showcase your best attributes.

abroad again

Traveling to new places can be positively addictive—and a positive addiction. Even more common than students with reverse culture shock are students who want to return abroad. There are many ways to go and things to do:

study again

Would you like to study abroad in a completely different part of the world, or return to the same country to delve in even more deeply to the culture? If you participated on a short-term program, you may want to consider a semester or academic year program—or vice-versa. You could also keep learning through an internship, research project, or service-learning program.

work

In the interest of cultural exchange, some countries offer short-term visas that enable students and recent graduates to work abroad for a short period of time (ranging from 4 to 12 months, depending on the country). Most people work in the hospitality, service, and farm industries, although with advance research, some are able to find pre-professional jobs. These work and travel programs are available in Australia, Canada, England, France, Ireland, and New Zealand, among other countries.

volunteer

The world can use a hand, and so there are thousands of volunteer programs in countries around the globe. Programs come in a wide variety of lengths, costs, skill requirements, types of work, and destinations. You will most likely need to cover your expenses through a program fee, many of which include a donation to the local organization. The places that need your assistance most can least afford to pay even your most basic costs.

teach

Native English speakers are a prized commodity in many countries, so it is possible to find teaching positions without possessing certification in many places around the world. You can apply to a program which will provide training and placement, such as CIEE Teach Abroad, or apply directly to schools that advertise on the web.

graduate school and research grants

If you are thinking about attending graduate school, consider completing a full degree abroad. Organizations such as Fulbright and Rotary offer competitive scholarships for graduate study and research abroad.

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