

The stages of re-entry

Some psychologists who study re-entry to one's home culture describe it as a process with four stages.

Disengagement. Begins abroad, when the traveler realizes that he or she will be soon returning to his or her home culture or country. The traveler spends more time thinking of home than at earlier stages in the experience abroad. Being preoccupied in this way often puts a little distance between the traveler and the people and culture of the host country. Some travelers do not begin to "disengage" until arriving home and this can make their arrival somewhat jarring.

Euphoria. The traveler is happy at the prospect of returning home to friends, family, familiar places, favorite foods, and to once again being a native speaker of the local language. The intensity and duration of this stage depend on how much the traveler enjoyed living abroad vs. living at home: someone who was very happy abroad may experience very little or no "homecoming euphoria"; someone who was unhappy abroad will experience much more of it.

Dampened Euphoria. Characterized by various dissatisfactions with one's home, uncertainty about how one fits into his or her home culture, and missing some aspects of one's life abroad. There is a tendency to compare the culture of one's home country to that of one's host country. Travelers need to guard against being judgmental and to avoid alienating friends and family by being overly critical or by constantly talking about their travels. This stage usually begins after the traveler has been home for a short time, but among people who were very happy abroad, it may begin immediately upon arrival.

Gradual Readjustment. The fourth stage involves the traveler getting accustomed to being home again, and finding new ways to fit into his or her home culture, which looks different than it did before his or her time abroad. The traveler decides which parts of the international experience to incorporate into daily life (preparing sushi at home), and which simply cannot be made to fit (having a Japanese bathtub). Since the traveler has been changed by his or her experiences, he or she develops new ways of relating to family and to old friends, and may instead develop new friends who better understand his or her travel experience. This stage can last decades.

— Summarized from the NAFSA publication *Back in the USA: Reflecting on Your Study Abroad Experience and Putting it to Work*.