

While You're Away

Cultural Adaptation - What to expect

You'll recall that back in the section on [Cross-cultural Living](#), we talked about the stages of culture shock you may expect as you adapt to your new temporary home.

This graph below should refresh your memory or you can follow the link above or use the sidebar menu to revisit that module.

Tips for Cultural Adaptation

Activity: Graph Your Cultural Adaptation

One of the best ways to be aware of your cultural adaptation process is to plot a graph your emotional well-being over time, similar to the example here. Decide on what time scale you'd like to use (daily, every other day, weekly) and then ask yourself "How am I feeling on a scale of 1-10?" Plot that on your graph and keep track of your stages of adaptation. Sometimes just knowing your ups and downs are normal can help you cope.

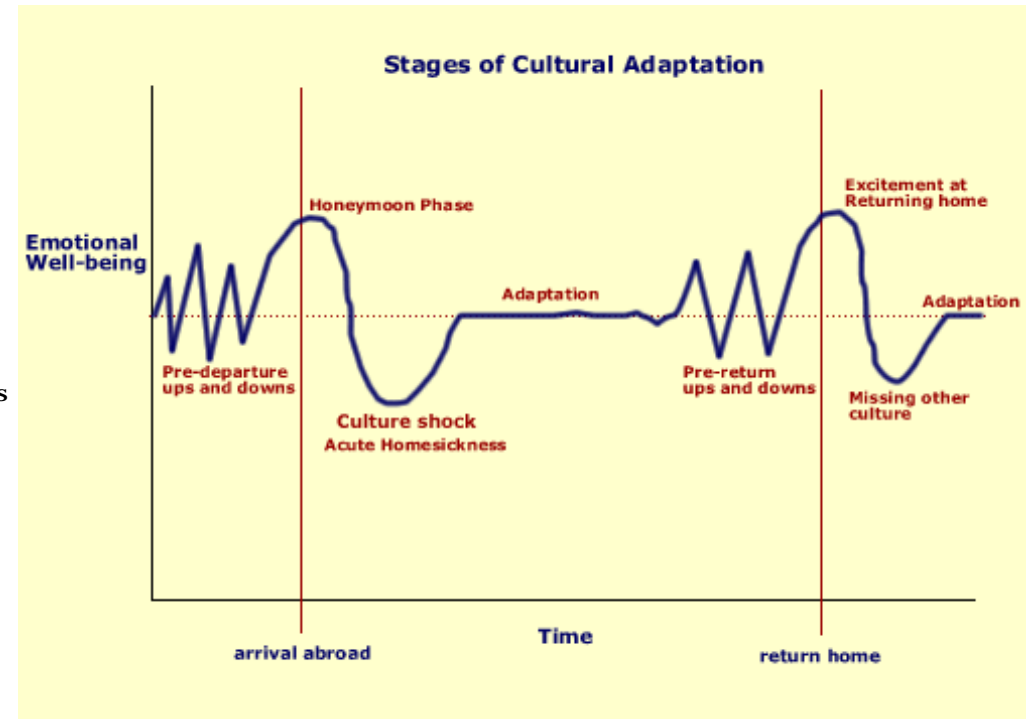
During the Honeymoon Phase

- Enjoy the feeling that you are really in a different culture. Record your thoughts in your journal; you will want to read them later at a time when you may not be quite so enchanted with your host culture.
- Although everything about your new location may seem interesting (even the television commercials) remember you also need some rest and down time to recover from your trip and settle in properly.
- Try not to look too much like a lost tourist; this will attract unwanted attention from con artists and thieves.
- Don't forget to call home and let people know you've arrived safely.

Culture Shock and Homesickness

- Remember that homesickness and feeling culture shock are a normal part of the adaptation process. Recognize that this is what's happening and don't be too hard on yourself.
- Find some small children to make friends with (baby-sit, volunteer somewhere). A four-year-old can really make you feel valued even if they've only known you a day or so.
- Keep a journal, it can really show you how you're doing if you read what you wrote when you first arrived and compare it to the present.
- Phone home, e-mail and talk to people who know you.
- Get involved. Join a club, find a part-time job, volunteer.
- Escape a bit. Read a book, draw, play or listen to music.
- Exercise

Dealing with Severe Homesickness - Get Me Outta Here! I Want to go Home.



This usually happens when you first arrive or when you've experienced a traumatic event (robbery, violent crime etc.). Use the suggestions above and:

- If you've just arrived, **give yourself a little more time**. See how things are when classes start. You may meet people and find more to do. Many international students arrive before the beginning of a term and they get very depressed because no one is around and facilities are not open. Things can change totally once the students come back and classes start.
- It's probably been a long trip, you haven't had much sleep and you probably haven't eaten properly. The **lack of sleep and time change affects your mood and thinking**. It makes everything seem that much more foreign and it makes you miss home even more. This is normal. Most people feel much more positive about things once they've had a good sleep and at least a week to adjust to the time change. Jet lag can last a long time. It makes you wake up in the middle of the night and of course everything seems more lonely in the middle of the night.
- **Don't put too much pressure on yourself**. You won't be a failure if you do come home - you'll have learned a lot about life and you will have made the right decision for you.

If you do come back just remember that you don't have to justify yourself to anyone. Just say "things didn't work out for me there" or "it wasn't the right thing for me right now" Also remember, that this doesn't mean you will never travel again. It may not be a great experience right now but in a few years you might be totally ready to take off somewhere for an adventure. You are not a failure because at least you tried. Think of all the people who have never left home because they are too scared. You have managed to survive the long plane ride and all the airport confusion, find your place to live and settle in -- more than many people every dream they could do.

Just settled in and... It's time to go

It often seems that you've only just arrived and settled in and then, you need to start planning for your return home. Remember all the ups and downs you experienced before you left home? It will be very much like that again. Be prepared. Be organized and plan ahead, this can greatly reduce your stress level.

Take care of logistics well in advance.

- Book your return flight so you don't find all the seats are full on the days you need to fly.
- Pay your bills and any other debts before you leave
- get copies of your course outlines, evaluations or transcripts, you may need them when you get home.
- Leave enough time to say good bye to people properly. You'll regret it later if you don't spend some quality time with all the important people who made your stay fun and successful.
- Say thank you. People appreciate it especially when you remember someone who helped you out several months ago when you first arrived.
- Have 'business' cards made up with your home and e-mail addresses, this will save you having to write them out so many times.

Re-entry

For tips on dealing with **Re-entry Shock** upon your return home go to the section [When you Return](#).

Looking After Academics While You're Away

There are a few details you should take care of while you're away. This will ensure that everything will be in place when you arrive home to start your next term.

- Have you obtained a copy of all your course outlines? Remember these must include the type and weight of course evaluations, number of lecture and seminar/lab hours, reading lists etc.?
- By what date do you need to register for your next semester courses?
- When do you need to pay your enrollment deposit?
- By what date do you need to apply for student loans?

away

- Will you be living in on-campus residence next year? Ensure that you apply for housing by the deadline.
- When should you order an official transcript from your host institute for personal use?
- How do you ensure that you have paid all your financial obligations before leaving your host institute

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When You Return