

STUDY ABROAD

NAVIGATING CULTURE SHOCK when moving abroad

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Living in a different country from the one I was raised in is the most out-of-context I've ever felt. Suddenly my social or familial background, which formed a big part of my identity, did not apply to my new situation anymore. I was left to carve out a new identity for myself.

A cultural relativist approach here will allow you to understand and even appreciate that life works differently in different places. You might be thrown off by how people can talk both in very straightforward or coded language. This can mean someone sending you an elaborately structured 500-word email which mentions everything else on planet Earth other than the one word they're trying to tell you - 'no', or a friend simply handing you back the food you took over to their place after eating because there's no one else who wants to finish it.

Every time you're thinking in your head "That's not how we would communicate back home", remind yourself you're not home, and part of this experience is going to make you a more resilient person who knows how to communicate with people from very different places.

Remember that you will feel isolated, you will feel homesick but know that it takes time for a new place to feel like home. Make an effort to mix with people, attend university events, explore places around you and do as much as you can to seek out connections and good experiences. It's up to you to ground yourself in your new surroundings.

Try your best to have a support system in place. This can mean making new friends, being in touch with a local diaspora community or international student organisation or seeking out relatives or mutual friends from back home who are close by. This can help absorb your culture shock by giving you the chance to occasionally disappear into the kind of gathering you're used to from back home. Every campus usually has resources for supporting international students, so make sure to check out what is available to you.

While it is important to try to make connections in your new country, remember you still

have people rooting for you back home who you didn't lose just because you moved to a new time zone. Make time to connect with your family and friends from back home by video calling, starting a Netflix watch party, or just texting them updates from your day. You'll learn that these are your most solid connections no matter where you go.

Moving abroad may look easy because everyone else around you are doing it. But the truth is, just because an experience is common doesn't make it easy. I don't say this discouragingly. Leaving home is a complex experience which enriches your life in many ways. It's just important to keep our expectations realistic, be prepared to work hard and know that your new life won't be like life at home.

At times it may feel like it's you against the world but remind yourself that you're on a journey that will better yourself in the long run. The moment you get good grades at the end of the semester or earn money for yourself in this brand new place, much of your struggles will feel validated. After all, your life isn't meant to be easy; it's meant to be well-lived.

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Study abroad Myth bustingfor parents

Misconceptions amongst elders when it comes to foreign universities are abundant, resulting from a lack of proper knowledge and awareness. This can lead to contention at home, as the two generations have different opinions on applications. Let's debunk some of these myths.

The higher the rank, the better

This superficial obsession with a few big-name universities is illogical, since rankings don't always reflect reality. Applicants should choose institutions that align with their interests instead of being fixated on rankings.

ECAs don't matter

Many parents believe that getting accepted to a foreign university is solely determined by grades on your report card. However, most foreign universities look for students who have well-rounded profiles. Admissions officers want applicants who stand out from their peers and pursue passions outside of the classroom as well.

Top universities bear all the costs for the most talented students

Scholarships are usually merit-based, awarded to applicants with the best profiles each year. However, not all universities offer scholarships. On the other hand, need-based aid is only provided to applicants whose annual family income is lower than the university's decided threshold.