

Coping with Reverse Culture Shock



Reverse Culture Shock is a term used to describe the feelings of surprise, disorientation, confusion, etc. experienced when people return to their home country and find they do not fit in as they used to. This may be due to a change in perspective, a decrease in excitement, an appreciation for and of different customs, or because during the travels the home country was idealized.

Stay Connected to Your Experiences

Being home, combined with the pressures of job, school, family, and friends often conspires to make returnees worried that they might somehow “lose” their experience. By maintaining contacts abroad, practicing cross-cultural skills, sharing with others you can remember and honor your time abroad.

The internet connects large forums of like-minded and travel-oriented people. Join message boards, Facebook groups and online communities to meet others you can talk to about your travels and getting used to life back at home. The internet can also be used as a media outlet. Reading newspapers from Davis can make you feel connected to your time here.

Telling your story of your adventures abroad is another way to stay connected to your experiences. You might even inspire someone to travel to the U.S. If you are not comfortable talking to people you can also tell your story through a scrapbook or journal.

Why Does Reverse Culture Shock Occur?

People who have lived abroad often find the adjustment to returning home is more difficult than their adjustment to the foreign culture. This occurs due to a difference in expectations. We expect to have some difficulty when we go to a new place, but not when we are returning to a place we already know.

You may not realize how much you have changed. In adjusting to life in a new culture, your perceptions, habits, and maybe even values have changed, perhaps without your awareness, to fit in with the cultural context of your host country. At the same time, you’ve carried around in your head a wonderful mental picture of your home environment. All of a sudden, when you return home, reality just doesn’t measure up to that picture.

This is a common occurrence, and the best way to address it is to be aware of your negative feelings.

Be assured that in time, you will be able to balance an appreciation for the positive aspects of culture at home as well as abroad.



Symptoms of Reverse Culture Shock

Your reactions to re-entry may vary, but common signs are:

- Restlessness
- Rootlessness
- Boredom
- Depression
- Uncertainty
- Insecurity
- Frustration
- Confusion regarding roles and expectations
- Isolation
- Wanting to be alone
- Need for sleep
- Changes in goals or priorities
- Negativity towards home culture

Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock

Communicate. Be open with family and friends about the possibility that you may miss your host family / country. This will help them understand why you aren't immediately jumping into your "old lifestyle".

Remind yourself of the pros & cons. Every environment has positive and negative factors to it. Before your return home, make a list of things that you are looking forward to and also things that you did not miss. By reading over this list you can regain an accurate picture of your home country so that you don't idealize it and then feel let down.

Think about your changes. It is always nice to reflect on the ways a new experience has impacted us. Your time abroad has probably changed you in some ways. Be positive about your growth and your changes and be accepting of others that have not had the same experience.

Familiar Patterns. There may be patterns that were part of your life that you don't find as comfortable anymore. There may be patterns from your time abroad that you wish to incorporate. Finding the space in your life and balance between these two could take some time. Allow yourself time to adjust into what will now be your new pattern.

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