

- Be careful not to send the wrong messages. This means learning the cues for seriousness in a relationship. In some cultures, what is a casual friendship to you might be taken much more seriously. Some cultures also have the stereotype that U.S. Americans are loose and casual about sex, *so* be aware of how your behavior might be perceived.

And if you are serious:

- Make sure that you both get a chance to visit the other's culture and home before making a commitment.
- Be honest with yourself about whether or not you could live permanently in your partner's culture.

Conclusion:

Your study abroad can be the most amazing experience. By thinking carefully how to become involved and interact with people in the host culture, you can actively make a difference in the quality of your stay and in the amount that you learn. Remember it's one thing to be in the vicinity of events and another to actively participate in them.

IN-COUNTRY CULTURE STRATEGIES PART II: ADJUSTING

I know that *I* made a lot of mistakes, some I probably did not even realize at the time, but *I* am sure that others did. Nevertheless, I think the positive thing about this was the way that *I* reacted to the mistakes *I* made. I did *try* and accept them as part of cultural learning. *I* knew that it was unrealistic to expect myself to do everything correctly or customary *the first time* I did it. This does not mean that *I* was always comfortable with making mistakes. At times it became very hard to always have to be watching others and, in a way, to depend on them in order to do things correctly.... These mistakes made me more aware of cultural *differences* and more motivated to learn about the culture, ways I could adapt to it, and how I could grow as a person from them. –Jessica Novotny, Spain

Jessica was effective in crossing cultures because she knew how to learn about culture. People who are effective purposely create learning opportunities, immerse themselves in the culture, and learn from their mistakes and from insiders. Effective travelers have also learned to manage stress and handle their emotions. They are not afraid to take risks and to try out new behaviors. They never think they know it all, because cultures, persons, and situations are always changing. To stay on top of things, effective travelers are always learning and challenging themselves. This section focuses on some common processes of adjusting to the host country so that you can best understand how to manage your stress and emotional reactions in order to make the most of your experience.

Understanding Cross-Cultural Adjustment

When you are overseas, *it's* exhausting. There needs to be a chapter on naps
– 'A Guide to Taking Naps Abroad.' – Suzanne Hay, Greece

Being able to adjust to the new environment and culture is perhaps one of the most important facets of your experience abroad. Not only will your cross-cultural adjustment help your learning and development in the new country, it will make your international life more rewarding and interesting.

Nearly everybody goes through an adjustment when starting a new job or moving to a new city, so in some ways, adjusting to the host country is like other transitions. Except that when you start your life in a foreign country, for the first time you can encounter many cultural and language differences that you didn't need to contend with when you started a new school or job.

According to anthropologist P. K. Bock, there are three kinds of adjustment that someone who goes into an unfamiliar environment must make: physical, societal, and internal. A traveler who is well-adjusted should have a pretty good handle on all three.

- Physical adjustment: this involves getting used to the more obvious differences – a new transportation system, the foods that you don't have at home, the system of education at the host university, etc.
- Social adjustment: this involves deeper acknowledgement and acceptance of the host country's values, beliefs, and ways of doing things. Note that it is possible for you to maintain your own belief system while at the same time integrating some of theirs.
- Internal adjustment: this is where you come to terms with your own intercultural identity and are able to incorporate and integrate both cultures with a minimum of discord.

Two kinds of people avoid difficulties with cultural adjustment and culture shock:

1. Those who are naturally comfortable with the above and are extremely flexible (these types of travelers do exist, but they are rare).
2. Those who recreate "home" while abroad. They surround themselves with their native language, foods, and peoples. The question facing these individuals is: Why? Why go to all the work to leave home and then end up taking it with you?

Our advice? Go get a bit of culture shock. Explore and challenge yourself to really learn about the cultures surrounding you.

Understanding Culture Shock and the Stages of Adjustment

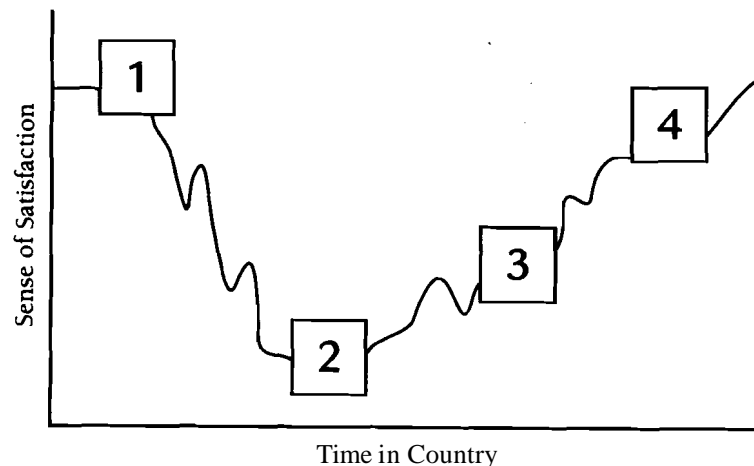
The confusion is a cliché; any American, any foreigner, who has lived or worked here will tell you how the cycle goes. Step one, *arrival*. Step two, *This place is so different!* Step three, *This place is really just like home!* Step four, *formation* of conclusion: *Now I think I understand this place.* Step five, *collapse of confusion*; too many exceptions. Step six, *repeat from step two.* –from *The Outnation: A Search for the Soul of Japan* by Jonathan Rauch

No doubt you've heard of culture shock and you may be thinking, "I know enough about the country so the cultural differences won't present a problem for me." It's true the more you know about your host country, including the language, the easier it will be to adjust. Expecting the differences is helpful, but keep in mind it's the actual cultural confrontation that brings about physical and emotional reactions.

In most cases, culture shock is caused less by one single incident and more by the gradual accumulation of anxiety, frustration, and confusion from living in a new unfamiliar environment. Some prefer the terms "culture fatigue" or "culture bumps." And while not everyone experiences some kind of "shock," everyone does go through some adjustment to their environment.

Many people who have been abroad discuss their experience in terms of stages. Often times these stages resemble a "U-curve," which represents the traveler's well-being throughout the experience of living abroad (Lysgaard, 1955). Take a minute to acquaint yourself with the four stages of culture shock and the diagram of the U-curve.

The "U" Curve of Culture Shock and Cross-Cultural Adjustment



Stage 1: Cultural Euphoria

At the start of your study abroad there is an initial excitement about being in a new culture. This is often called the "honeymoon stage." Everything is new and wonderful, and you are eager to explore it all. This phase seems pleasant enough, but there are some drawbacks involved. You tend to see the culture through rose-colored glasses, and your interpretations aren't necessarily realistic. You also focus more on all the visible aspects of the culture (e.g., food, scenery, clothing) and are ignoring the more complex and less obvious cultural aspects. In addition, you tend to focus on similarities rather than differences in the early stage of the visit. Most tourists who travel for a short period of time remain in this stage for their entire stay.

Stage 2: Cultural Confrontation

In the next stage (typically one third to one half the way through an experience), the initial excitement you felt when you arrived diminishes and the process of cultural adjustment begins. This stage is typically characterized by confusion and frustration and, as such, is the most difficult stage. Your feelings can shift from very positive to extremely negative. You may view both the home and host cultures in unrealistic terms; one is superior while the other is lacking. This is because everything that you used to do with relative ease in your home country appears much more difficult due to the culture and/or the language. Homesickness may also contribute to your feelings of discomfort. You feel discouraged and begin to doubt whether you can learn the language or adjust to the culture. Despite these feelings, you are making critical progress in expanding your cross-cultural awareness and, whether or not you are aware of it, you are developing your own **strategies** for coping with cultural differences.

When I was in Malaysia doing an independent research project, I definitely experienced many cultural differences. One was that you bartered for products. No prices were fixed, except the prices of pewter and cultural pewter artifacts, which were fixed by the government. I had my eye on a set of pewter carvings that depicted the various ethnic groups of Malaysia, but they were quite expensive and I was really on a shoe-string budget. One day, the government announced the price of pewter dropped. Thrilled, I went to the local store and asked about the new price. They politely explained that while it is common to barter in Malaysia, one does not barter for pewter. I politely explained that I knew that, but that the government had just reduced the set price. They politely explained again that pewter was not something one bartered for. I did not respond politely and started yelling that I knew this about Malaysia but that the government had lowered prices. Entirely frustrated, I left the store. I had lost it. Yelling is not a normal strategy for me, even when I'm convinced I'm right. However, the stress of always running into new situations got to me. That's culture shock. When the price in the store was lowered several days later to reflect the new government policy, I sent a friend to purchase it. I wish I would have also apologized so the store owners knew that U.S. Americans don't usually do this! — Barbara Kappler, Malaysia

Stage 3: Cultural Adjustment

This stage represents the transition out of culture shock into significant cultural adjustment. You feel increasingly comfortable and competent in the culture, and these feelings prevail over the times you have felt frustrated or out of place. Homesickness may still be an issue for you, but you are interacting more effectively with host nationals, leading to an increase in self-confidence. You start to look forward to further interactions in the host country and what you can learn throughout the remainder of your experience.

Stage 4: Cultural Adaptation

In this stage, you have reached a point at which you have a great deal of confidence in your ability to communicate and interact effectively. You have a deeper understanding of the influence culture has in peoples' lives. You have acquired considerable cultural knowledge, but you also recognize that there is much you still don't know or understand. You have integrated many of the values, customs, and behaviors from the new culture into your daily life. You now possess the ability to examine and comprehend a wide range of cultural norms, values, and beliefs.

relax. comfort. ride. chill.

After being here and having gotten used to the systems and customs and safety and unwritten rules and street knowledge and language, you know you're adapting well when getting into a matatu isn't a three-hour ordeal. you know you're adapting well when people don't try and cheat you with a high price after you barter with them in kiswahili. you know you're adapting well when you bribe your way into a cricket game for seventy shillings instead of eight hundred. you know you're adapting well when you can eat your food with ugali and chapati using your hands like a pro...you know you're adapting well when you can take down eleven glasses of chai in one day. riding the wave. feeling the rhythm. chilling and hoping that things will stay the way for a bit; but really knowing that they won't, and you will be confronted with new challenges and new opportunities and new feelings of discomfort and alienation and disconnectedness and fear. and the cycle continues – but this time at a different level, with a different understanding, and a different person emerges. and that's the beauty of life. and that's what we are here for – to discover our personalized truths as we find balance and pleasure...in our own struggle to survive... – Free Verse by Spencer Cronk, Kenya



Statements of adjustment

The goal of this activity is to give you the chance to think about adjustment and how you would react or help someone going through the process.

José and Steven are both juniors in college from the United States who meet in the same chemistry class while studying at a foreign university. Their class is taught in the host country's language, and because they are both unfamiliar with the difficult science vocabulary, they begin meeting at a local coffeeshop to study together and help each other understand the material. One evening, they find themselves in the midst of several tables of students, all speaking English. As the night winds down, they become immersed in a conversation with six other students around them, all of whom are from the United States. Although everyone is attending the local university, they did not all arrive in the host country at the same time. The amount of time in the host country for each of them falls between one and seven months.