



Culture Shock Guide



When you leave a familiar environment and go for an extended stay somewhere different, it's normal to feel out of control or confused. This is what's commonly called culture shock.

Even in countries similar to the United States and with the same language, you might feel the effects of culture shock. It comes from an initial lack of understanding or inability to fit into your new culture. Seemingly small things, such as the unavailability of certain foods, modes of dress, appropriate behavior and climate, might be more difficult to get used to than things you expected to be different, such as driving on the left side of the road. Remind yourself that your uncomfortable feelings will lessen as you become more immersed in your new culture.

While some elements of culture shock might not completely disappear, differences that seem overwhelming at the beginning of your stay will diminish and eventually become routine.

Culture shock is predictable and manageable. If you are prepared for it, you can do a great deal to control it.

FOUR PHASES OF CULTURE SHOCK

1. **Euphoria.** This is the tourist or honeymoon phase. You are excited about your new environment. You believe the people and way of life are not that different from what you are used to. Everything is new and exciting.
2. **Irritation and Hostility.** The initial excitement has faded and you begin to notice more dissimilarity between life in the foreign country and what you are used to. Minor nuisances and inconveniences lead to intense upset. Symptoms during this phase include homesickness, boredom, irritability, withdrawal (e.g., avoiding contact with locals, spending time with Americans only), compulsive eating or drinking, stereotyping of or hostility toward locals. Fortunately, most people only experience a few of these symptoms, but this second phase of culture shock is a difficult period. Be aware of these symptoms so you understand what is happening to you or your friends and can take steps to counteract them.
3. **Gradual Adjustment.** You gradually learn to change your perspective and adapt to the new culture. The culture becomes more familiar as you begin to orient yourself and are more able to interpret cultural cues. Your self-confidence returns and you realize the situation is not hopeless after all.

4. **Adaptation or Biculturalism.** Full recovery has occurred. At this time you realize that you enjoy some of the customs, ways of doing and saying things, and personal attitudes that bothered you so much in phase two. You may not realize how well you have adjusted to the new culture until it is time to return to the United States and you don't feel ready to leave. After returning home, you may experience reverse culture shock as you readapt to life in the U.S.

One of the best ways to deal with culture shock is to recognize the feelings you are experiencing are perfectly normal and should go away as you adjust.

MINIMIZING CULTURE SHOCK: STEPS TO HELP ADAPT TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

- Educate yourself about the place you're visiting before you leave. The more you understand about your new home before you get there, the smoother your adjustment will be.
- Get out and see your new surroundings by visiting museums, parks and major sites.
- Meet new people in your program and at your university. The more people you meet from the country, the more you can master the language and culture.
- Get involved in student clubs and events, and volunteer organizations in the community.
- Keep a journal of your feelings and observations. This is a great way to document all the things you did while studying abroad.
- Stay in touch with friends and family at TU and home.
- Remember your goals and all of the reasons you decided to explore study abroad. Remind yourself it's all worth it.
- Laugh at yourself. A sense of humor will help alleviate stressful situations.

If you are unable to cope with these differences or your new surroundings, contact someone at your host institution. Most universities and colleges employ professional counselors and tutors with special training in offering support and advice to help you integrate into the community and overcome any initial emotional and practical difficulties. You also can contact the CGE staff for support and recommendations for other resources to help you adapt.