

Definition of 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.

Why is it so shocking to return home?

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

- ✓ Restlessness, rootlessness
- ✓ Reverse homesickness (missing people and places from abroad)
- ✓ Boredom, insecurity, uncertainty, confusion, frustration
- ✓ Need for excessive sleep
- ✓ Change in goals or priorities
- ✓ Feelings of alienation or withdrawal
- ✓ Negativity towards American behavior

Prepare Yourself for 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. Others (friends and family) may feel that you are "different" while you feel frustrated that they are the same. Be positive about your growth and your changes and be accepting of others that have not had the same experience.
- Find your audience. Although many people will ask you about your travels, their interest in your stories and photos will fade quickly. Be prepared to feel a little frustrated that others are not as interested as you would want them to be. Keep your stories brief and general and look for an audience that will enjoy the more

expansive tales. Look into a speaking presentation at the Education Abroad Center on campus.

- 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. Be patient with your own readjustment to your home country and allow yourself time to adjust into what will now be your new pattern.



Keeping Connected to Your Experience

A great way to prevent or deal with reverse culture shock is by keeping connected to your host country once you return to the US. There are many ways you can do this:

- Find connections and interactions with the international student population at UC Davis – join an international student organization on campus.
- Continue language courses and speaking the native language of your host country.
- Explore options of future employment or internships / trips to your host country.
- Keep in touch with families and friends in the host country. Email, Skype or blogs are great communication tools.
- Read the local newspaper from your host country on-line or have it sent to you from friends – stay in touch with current events.
- Telling your story is a great way to inspire others to make the choice to study abroad.
- Enjoy your independence, increased awareness, sensitivity to diversity, and competency in foreign language that come with your experience.
- Make a scrapbook of your memories.



Seeking Counseling

Seeking counseling is a way to take care of oneself and to prevent physical and mental health problems. Speak with your program advisor while abroad or when you return if you feel you are in need of counseling to help you cope. To explore your coping mechanisms and setup positive plans for self-care, consider meeting with a counselor on-campus prior to leaving for your abroad program & upon returning.

Impact of Reverse Culture Shock

The adjustment to returning home can be more difficult than the adjustment you made to a new culture. When you return to the US, you may not expect to feel any shock because you lived here before, however, time away may have changed your perspective, lifestyle, personal views and you may feel like a new person. You can explore these personal changes and your feelings of reverse culture shock with professional, confidential professionals on campus. Use the contact information below to schedule an appointment.

On-Campus Resources

- Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)
<http://caps.ucdavis.edu>
(530) 752-0871
- Cowell Student Health Center
<http://healthcenter.ucdavis.edu>
(530) 752-2300
- Education Abroad Center
<http://eac.ucdavis.edu>
(530) 297-4633

Returning Home:

Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock For U.S. students who studied abroad

“You may not realize how much you have changed after being gone”



**CAPS
Counseling &
Psychological Services
University of California, Davis**