

# Ten ways to deal with culture shock

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by **Jamie Lath**

Traveling to other countries can be an exhilarating and wonderful experience. When it is, treasure those moments and take lots of pictures. When it isn't... it's usually because you've suddenly realized you're "not in Kansas anymore." What felt exotic from your original home suddenly feels "weird," "uncomfortable," or "downright annoying" now that you're in this new culture. Don't let these down feelings get the best of you and ruin what could be an otherwise life-changing experience. Here are ten ways to deal with culture shock before and after it happens.

**Get an "informant"** (make friends with someone from the foreign-to-you culture). This can be the most important thing for surviving another culture, especially if this person becomes a close and trusted friend. This informant becomes the go-to when something happens that you can't make sense of, or if you have questions about what's appropriate or not. It's like having a "local culture dictionary" -- and can be vital for your sanity's survival.

**Get a same culture buddy** (make friends with someone from your own culture). This helps in having someone who either is going through or has recently gone through a lot of the shocks you are currently enduring. You can vent with someone who knows what a public restroom should look like. Just be careful not to let it slide into a "hate everything about this country" session.

## **Every day make yourself find something that you like about the culture**

Celebrating the good of the new culture can help take some of the edge off the things you see as bad. Think of it as the things you'll miss when you go back home; and as hard as it is to believe at times of heavy culture shock, there will be plenty of things that you miss one day.

## **Be a tourist**

Plan time to do the cheesy touristy things that the locals wouldn't be caught dead doing. It helps to be an outsider sometimes, because you can find wonder in things the locals don't even notice anymore. Sad to say, but once you see it day in and day out, those majestic mountains become just common place. So, before it becomes mundane to you too, stand in wonder at the wonders of the world. Extra points if you take a local with you and make him/her be your "tour" guide.

## **Do something that takes courage every day**

Eleanor Roosevelt is famous for saying this, and it's good advice to take. Besides, it's actually not that hard to do when you are somewhere foreign. Adventure surrounds you in another culture -- big and little. Taking courage can simply mean going to the market by yourself, but if you see it as an adventure, rather than a chore that will take you three times as long as it does in your own culture, you may actually find yourself having fun.

## **Do something familiar**

Figure out how to make your favorite food and do so often. Watch your favorite movies. Listen to music that makes you feel good in your own language. Have people over to celebrate your home culture's holidays your way. Sometimes you just need to close your eyes and hear, smell, taste the things that are home to you. It's amazing how good mac n' cheese can taste when you no longer have easy access to it.

## **Go for walks**

Spend time exploring on foot. In your own culture, you take for granted how the trash is picked up, how the mail is delivered, the colors that the houses are painted, etc. Take time in this new culture to figure out how the minutia of life gets done and being on foot helps you to notice the little details, plus it gets you out of the house for a little exercise.

## **Journal**

There's no better place to get it all out then on the pages of a book that no one else will see. It will also help for you to look back on it and see how far you've come, the humor in situations that weren't humorous at the time, and how you can help other newbies as they have the same problems. Consider taking this journal and sharing it in a blog form to help others as they transition, but be careful to gain some perspective before doing so. If you're in the ugly depths of culture shock, you may really hurt the local people with your mad ravings. Wait until you've cooled off; you'll be glad you did.

## **Ask for packages from home**

Ask someone--anyone--from home to send you the taco mix, chips, chapstick, shampoo, and wool socks that you can't find anywhere. It's amazing how great it is just to get a little care package with a few of your favorite candies, spices, drink mixes, t-shirts, scarves, etc. If you don't have anyone to ship them to you, then see if you can find a company that ships overseas. It may be a bit pricey, but it's worth it to have a few pieces of home every once in awhile.

## **Do your research**

Know what you're getting into before you go, or if you didn't before, then do it now. Research the web, buy some books, watch local movies, and learn the language. It will help you have some idea what you're getting yourself into. Note on learning the language: it will be hard at times and you'll feel like a two-year-old babbling incoherently, but not only will you gain a lot of insight into the culture by learning the language, you will also be able to function better. So, be prepared to look foolish and give it a try.