

Adapting to a new culture

If you listen to other people who have done their internships abroad, they often say that they had a good time. They might not want to mention the days when they found everything dull and grey and wanted to go back home.



You must be prepared that living in a new country is not only "GREAT!" It takes time to understand a new culture and it is sometimes frustrating not to be able to express yourself in your own language.

People adapting to a new culture often go through different "stages". They are mentioned here so that you can recognize your feelings more easily and that you know that it's normal to feel that way during an internship abroad.

1. "The honeymoon stage"

People enjoy the excitement that arises from being in a new place where everything is interesting.

How can you feel in this stage?

- ▶ Excited
- ▶ Nervous

How long can you be in this stage?

- ▶ 1 day – 4 weeks

2. "The rejection stage"

People may have put much effort in understanding different behaviors and habits in the new culture. Now they long for being in an environment where they can be easily understood and where they feel confident in everyday situations. They are fed up with the new country and long for things and people at home.

How can you feel in this stage?

- ▶ Frustrated
- ▶ Scared
- ▶ Home sick
- ▶ Sad

Difficult problems?

- ▶ Communication with natives
- ▶ Loneliness
- ▶ Hard to solve simple problems
- ▶ Negative to people in the new country

How can you cope with this stage?

- ▶ Be physically active. Exercise, swim, take an aerobics class, join a soccer team
- ▶ Talk with people that speak your own language and tell them how you feel.
- ▶ Allow yourself to feel sad.
- ▶ Focus your power on getting through this period.
- ▶ Plan activities in the evenings and on weekends so that you have something to look forward to, for example excursions to lakes or trips to close cities.
- ▶ Don't avoid people; put some effort in making new contacts.
- ▶ Don't hesitate to ask questions when you don't understand something.

3. "The adjustment stage"

People have got used to everyday life. Instead of standing outside and watching the culture with critical eyes, they are more or less included in the culture. Everything seems to run much more smoothly. You discover that there are both good and bad things in all cultures, even in your own.

How can you feel in this stage?

- ✦ Satisfied
- ✦ Comfortable

Voices from this stage...

- ✦ "I appreciated differences between my country and the host country."
- ✦ "I got accustomed to the system of the host country."
- ✦ "I found the host culture's advantage even if it's negative for me."

In the end of your internship you are strengthened by going through these stages. Coping with difficulties and new situations in a foreign culture improves your mind:

"It's a significant experience which you can be proud of!"