

Managing The Move

Katarzyna Richter, Cross Cultural Psychologist tells you how to cope with a culture shock.



Katarzyna Richter



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We've all faced instances where we've migrated to a different country and found it difficult to adjust to the culture of the new place. Culture shock is an unwelcomed side effect of moving from a familiar environment to a new country and culture. According to a research there are 3 types of conditions that determine the impact of culture shock:

- Cultural differences
- Individual differences
- Individual experiences one has and the treatment one receives from members of the host society

Though the transition is difficult you can cope with it. Here is how.

1. Prepare. Embrace yourself with knowledge of the country you are relocating to. A relocation training will help and includes cultural awareness training, communication workshops and bi cultural workshops.

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2. Ability to speak a local language makes a huge difference; even if you try to use a few words local hosts will highly appreciate it as it shows your interest in their country. Language is the gate to understanding the culture.

3. Stay openminded and avoid being judgemental. It is quite natural to relate things to your own culture. Shedding your ethnocentric approach will help build your

cultural intelligence. Keep reminding yourself of the phases of acculturation process.

4. Make a real effort to join interest groups. Whatever your interest is, find a local group who shares your passion. This will give you opportunity to make new friends, keep you busy and help establish a routine.

5. Develop new hobbies or skills.

6. Stay in touch with your family and friends back home. This will help deal with homesickness. That said don't spend all your time talking to them but also try and build new connections.

I recently conducted a quick poll asking fellow expatriates for their advice on handling transitions. This one was my favourite: Don't turn down a coffee invitation to go buying furniture or appliances. Let friends come first!

Symptoms of Culture Shock

According to the research done by Elisabeth Marx the symptoms last on average 7 weeks and can include:

- Strain caused by the distress of the adaptation process
- Sense of loss and feelings of deprivation, concerning friends, status, profession and possessions
- Feeling of rejection, isolation
- Confusion about one's role, expectations of others, values and self-identity
- Negative feelings such as anxiety, worry and anger, even disgust after realising the scope of cultural differences
- Feeling of helplessness as a result of not being able to cope with the new situation
- Physical symptoms including increased amount of illnesses and injuries.

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