



## Culture shock and homesickness: One and the same?

Is there a difference between homesickness and culture shock? Yes. Homesickness is the feeling we get when we're removed from familiar people, places and things. We're sad and long for home. Culture shock, on the other hand, is feeling overwhelmed and alienated trying to cope in a place where everything is different, from the climate, landscape, language, food, religion and dress to people's attitudes, values and way of communicating. We not only feel homesick, we may also feel:

- Anxious
- Depressed
- Isolated
- Irritable and angry
- Insecure

Culture shock can also result in sleep difficulties and trouble concentrating.

### The four stages of culture shock

It usually takes between six and 12 months to adapt to a new culture. During this time, people tend to go through four stages.

1. **The honeymoon stage.** Everything is fascinating and exhilarating and the differences we do notice seem exotic and interesting.
2. **The rejection stage.** The honeymoon is over and culture shock has set in. We feel like outsiders and want to cling to our own culture by only associating with people who share our background.
3. **The recovery stage.** We're beginning to regain a sense of perspective and are making friends inside and outside the expat community. We're starting to enjoy our new environment.
4. **The adjustment stage.** We're now comfortable and confident in the new country.

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When expats finally return to their home, they can expect to experience reverse culture shock as they re-adapt to what was once familiar.

### **Dealing with culture shock**

Until you're feeling comfortable in your new location, you may want to limit your use of social media. While social media is a great way to stay in touch with people and news at home, spending too much time following what friends and family are doing can increase feelings of homesickness and prevent you from exploring and connecting with your new location.

Reaching out for help and support both before and after arrival can also help ease the transition into a new way of life.

Contact us for more information on culture shock.

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