

Preparing to Return Home: Some Quick Tips

By Dr. Bruce LaBrack

Re-entry into your home culture can be both challenging and as frustrating as living overseas, mostly because our attitude toward going "home" is that it should be a simple matter of getting resettled, resuming your earlier routines, and re-establishing your relationships. However, world wide re-entry has its own set of special social and psychological adjustments which can be facilitated by being aware of the re-entry process and following some advice from those who have already returned.

The following list is compiled from many sources, but all of the tips come from returnees who offer these ideas in the hope of making your re-entry easier for you and for those at home.

1. Prepare for an adjustment process.

The more you consider your alternatives, think about what is to come, and know about how returning home is both similar to and different from going abroad, the easier the transition will be. Anticipating is useful. As one psychologist put it, "Worrying helps."

2. Allow yourself time.

Re-entry is a process that will take time, just like adjusting to a new foreign culture. Give yourself time to relax and reflect upon what is going on around you, how you are reacting to it, and what you might like to change. Give yourself permission to ease into the transition.

3. Understand that the familiar will seem different.

You will have changed, home has changed, and you will be seeing familiar people, places, and behaviors from new perspectives. Some things will seem strange, perhaps even unsettling. Expect to have some new emotional and psychological reactions to being home. Everyone does.

4. There will be much "cultural catching up" to do.

Some linguistic, social, political, economic, entertainment and current event topics will be unfamiliar to you as new programs, slang, and even governmental forms may have emerged since you left. You may have some learning to do about your own culture. (Note: most returnees report that major insights into themselves and their home countries occur during re-entry).

5. Reserve judgements.

Just as you had to keep an open mind when first encountering the culture of a new foreign country, try to resist the natural impulse to make snap decisions and judgements about people and behaviors once back home. Mood swings are common at first and your most valuable and valid analysis of events is likely to take place after allowing sometime for thorough reflection.

6. Respond thoughtfully and slowly.

Quick answers and impulsive reactions often characterize returnees. Frustration, disorientation, and boredom in the returnee can lead to behavior that is incomprehensible to family and friends. Take some time to rehearse what you want to say and how you will respond to predictable questions and situations; prepare to greet those that are less predictable with a calm, thoughtful approach.

7. Cultivate sensibility.

Showing an interest in what others have been doing while you have been on your adventure overseas is the surest way to re-establish rapport. Much frustration in returnees stems from what is perceived as disinterest by others in their experience and lack of opportunity to express their feelings and tell their stories. Being as a good a listener as a talker is a key ingredient in mutual sharing.

8. Beware of comparisons.

Making comparisons between cultures and nations is natural, particularly after residence abroad; however, a person must be careful not to be seen as too critical of home or too lavish in praise of things foreign. A balance of good and bad features is probably more accurate and certainly less threatening to others. The tendency to be an "instant expert" is to be avoided at all costs.

9. Remain flexible.

Keeping as many options open as possible is an essential aspect of a successful return home. Attempting to re-socialize totally into old patterns and networks can be difficult, but remaining aloof is isolating and counterproductive. What you want to achieve is a balance between maintaining earlier patterns and enhancing your social and intellectual life with new friends and interests.

10. Seek support networks.

There are lots of people back home who have gone through their own re-entry and understand a returnees concerns — academic faculty, exchange students, international development staff, diplomatic corps, military personnel, church officials, and businessmen and women. University study-abroad and foreign student offices are just a few of the places where returnees can seek others who can offer support and country-specific advice.

Compiled by Dr. Bruce LaBrack. School of International Studies, University of the Pacific for use by the Institute of International Education, San Francisco. Aspire Newsletter.

For more information on how to identify and cope with re-entry culture shock, read **section 5 of your AHA student handbook** or visit www.ahastudyabroad.org to read about re-entry or download the student handbook:

Section 5: Returning Home

- . Making travel arrangements
- . US Customs
- . Change and adjustment
- . Levels of readjustment
- . Acknowledging your adjustment
- . Sharing your adjustment
- . Staying in contact with your host culture
- . Seeking others out and getting involved

textbooks

All books handed out in your classes are yours to keep!

If you have any textbooks you don't want to take home with you bring them to the Centre and give them to Leah.

PLEASE do not leave them with your homestay family!



This week's events

Monday, March 22nd

All classes will meet at AHA today

12:30 pm Mandatory Group meeting

Tuesday, March 23rd

All classes will meet at AHA today

3:30 pm **EXAM:** London Theatre

Wednesday, March 24th

NO ICE class today.

1:00 pm Last Tudor England meeting. Exam due in class.

Thursday, March 25th

10:00 am **EXAM:** Victorian Art & Architecture

4:00 pm Take home exams for Reinventing Nature and The Victorian city due.

4:00 pm Recollection and re-entry conversation (mandatory)

5:00 pm End of term meal at Ciao Bella

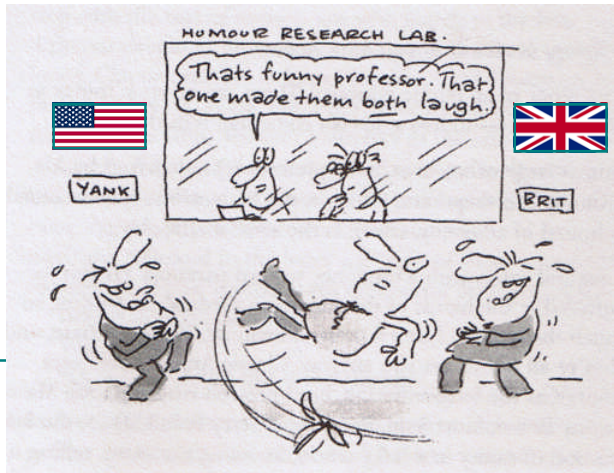
Saturday, March 27th

REMINDER:

Just like Cinderella's pumpkin carriage, your Oyster Card expires at midnight!



A bit of Brit talk - a different sense of humour?



Have a safe trip home

The AHA staff and faculty congratulate you on completing the Fall Quarter Programme.

We hope you've had a wonderful time in London and made lifelong memories and friends.

We wish you all the best for your future endeavours. Don't forget to stop by to see us when you come back to London!

The AHA team

To prepare for your Finals...

- . Get plenty of sleep to feel rested on exam days.
- . Go to the gym or go for a walk; oxygen is good for the brain.
- . Eat lots of veggies and fish to boost your memory.
- . Read over your notes or textbooks on the tube when commuting, it's a good time saver!

Don't forget to complete your evaluations for the Quarter Programme

Your feedback and comments are very important to us!

It only takes a few minutes and contributes a lot to improving the programme. THANKS!

