

BEFORE YOU GO, YOU SHOULD KNOW

Volume 5: Culture Shock and Homesickness

Culture shock can be extremely jarring or very subtle, but is almost always present when adapting to a new country. You may not be able to prepare yourself for how you will react to new surroundings, but you can take the time to consider what elements may lead to culture shock and how you will handle it. We recommend researching different theories on the pattern of culture shock (type "Culture Shock" into Google or a similar search Engine) as a preparation activity.

Feeling homesick is quite common during the first semester of the program and may be a concern for some of you. Establishing regular, but not dominant contact with friends and family back home can help with the initial adjustment, but should not impede on becoming involved in your role as an FLTA. Reaching out to colleagues, members of the community and fellow FLTAs can help when feeling lonely and also help to ease you out of homesickness into not wanting to leave!

Handling culture shock:

Culture shock is not always negative! Try to enjoy the differences you observe and consider the influences that make the U.S. different from your country.

- ◆ What resources are on campus? What resources can the International Students' Office offer?
- ◆ Fellow FLTAs: You are a part of a great network of peers! Share your stories, concerns, and difficult times with each other
- ◆ Humor: Learning to laugh at yourself and with others will go a long way

Piece of advice: Stay positive! It can be easy to fall into a cycle of negativity if you are constantly identifying differences that you dislike. If you find yourself getting caught in a negative spin, try to remind yourself of the important impact you are having on your community and your goals for joining the program.

Keeping in touch with family and friends:

There are a few inexpensive and reliable ways to get in touch with family and friends in your home country, as long as they have access to a computer or phone. Look into the availability for your family and friends to establish consistent communication.

- ◆ Email
- ◆ Calling cards
- ◆ Skype

****Warning****

Due to the time difference, you may be calling your family and friends late at night after a long day of teaching and studying which will start up again early the following morning. Be careful not to stay up too late too often during the week. You will end up exhausting yourself and having less energy to make the most of your time in the U.S. We recommend creating a schedule for yourself and your family of speaking once or twice a week.

Please note: Friends and family may visit only during times of the year when the host institution is not in session. It is not acceptable for them to stay for an extended period of time.

Handling homesickness

Should you find yourself feeling homesick, we recommend reaching out to resources on campus and in the community to help.

- ◆ What resources are on campus? What resources can the International Students' Office offer?
- ◆ Stay active in your community; what events are happening on campus? Can you invite some peers to attend with you?
- ◆ Host activities on campus related to your culture
- ◆ Reach out to fellow FLTAs
- ◆ Reach out to colleagues on campus

Recommended tasks:

- ◆ Make a list of things you believe will be very different from your country (this could range from food, treatment of elders, friendliness, dress etc.) You may want to rank them in the order in which you think they will be most challenging or exciting
 - Throughout the year you can refer to this list to see if you were right or if you are ultimately, surprised!

Enjoy!

Regards,
FLTA Staff