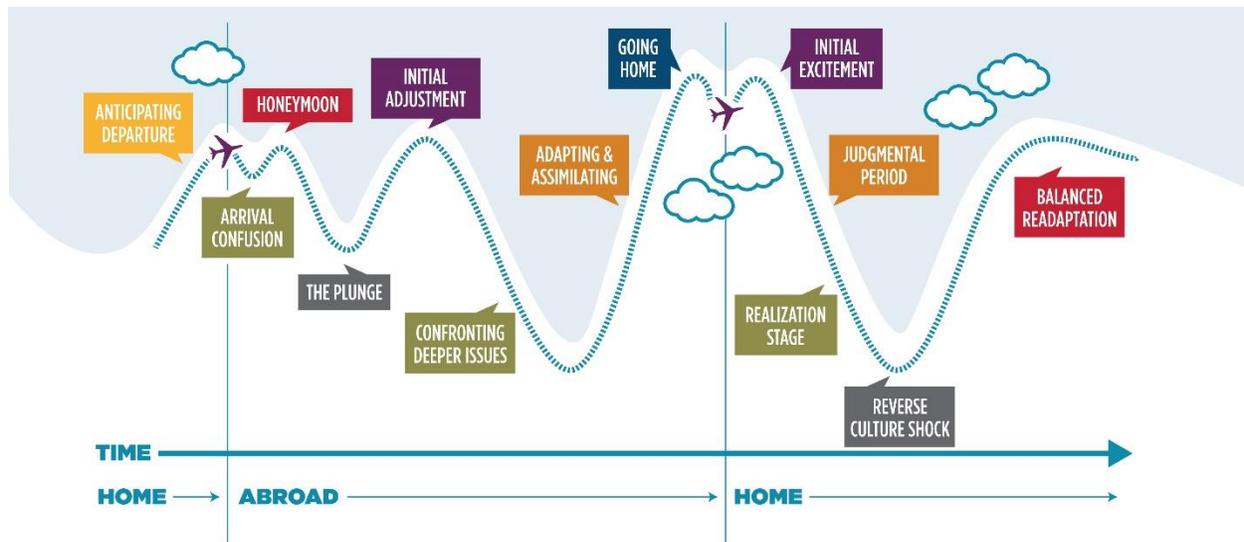


Stages of Transition



The stages of Transition depicted above are adapted in part from the works of Margaret Pusch and other leaders in the field of study abroad and are intended as a guide to help students and their parents understand the experience of cultural adaptation. Students may pass through these stages in a different order or skip some stages altogether. As your student encounters these stages, listen, praise accomplishments, and offer support. Try not to make cultural or value judgments. Instead, ask about differences and try to understand them together.

Anticipating Departure

With the excitement of preparation comes the formation of expectations and goals. To prepare for the transition, students should research the country in which they will study. They should remain realistic in their expectations to avoid disappointment.

Arrival Confusion

The first few days can be very trying, disorienting, and intimidating. It is not uncommon for a student to call home, upset about housing, the city, jetlag, or local people. If your student is upset, instruct him or her to speak with the local

IES Abroad Center staff, who are ready to help during this initial adjustment period.

The Honeymoon

As everything in the host country is typically new, different, and fascinating, many students respond by being on a cultural high, feeling that everything is wonderful.

The Plunge

When the novelty wears off, students can become frustrated and confused by the need to adjust to new ways of communicating and differences in living style, food, social customs, and classroom interactions. Although difficult, this stage prepares students to engage with the new culture at a deeper level.

Initial Adjustment

As students develop their language and social skills, they become more confident and comfortable with local transportation, communication, and social customs. Understanding these aspects of culture and responding appropriately are important accomplishments.

Confronting Deeper Issues

As students confront cultural differences and personal issues at a deeper level, they begin to see a multitude of approaches to their life abroad and to question deeper assumptions about the world. Students may feel isolated at times.

Adapting and Assimilating

The sense of isolation subsides as students begin to feel more at home and identify with new ways of thinking and behaving. At this point, students are comfortable with their home identities and with the adapted identities they have developed in the new culture. Not all students will reach this stage, so do not be disappointed if your student does not.

In conclusion, the overseas experience does not end when a student boards the plane to return home. Study abroad is followed by a period of remembering, analyzing, and interpreting the overseas experience. The

transition back to the home culture can be a challenging time, in part because it is unexpected. Students go home to what they believe are familiar, unchanged family and friends. While you may feel that you have not changed a great deal, your student may feel that you have. Students gain a new perspective as a result of their experiences abroad, with new frames of reference. They are trying to reconcile two very different cultures.

It is not uncommon for students to feel temporarily homesick for their overseas friends and lifestyle. They may also find that life at home is more demanding than they expected and that they no longer feel as unique and special as they were when abroad. Although each day at home may bring new challenges, they most likely are not as exciting or exotic as the challenges overseas.

Eventually, students will reach a balance between the new and the old, the foreign and the familiar. They will fully integrate life overseas with life at home, appreciating both cultures for their own inherent worth. In so doing, your student will be well on his or her way to the development of intercultural competence, one of the greatest rewards of studying abroad. While this can take time, it can have great personal and social benefits