
MOVE OVERSEAS WITH EASE

TIPS AND IDEAS TO LIVE
YOUR BEST LIFE ABROAD

BY DEBORAH DAHAB



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WHY I WROTE THIS EBOOK

I decided to write this eBook to help you if you're moving to a new country.

You see, I have moved around a lot. I've been an expat for over 40 years. I've had great transitions when I felt could navigate smoothly in the new culture. But I must admit that many of my cultural transitions have been painful and difficult. Sometimes adjusting to a new culture, new people, new environments seemed like an insurmountable task.

Over the years, I have learned from my personal experiences, from my Master's in Intercultural Psychology, and from my clients. Knowing what the most common challenges are, I decided to create this eBook to help you tackle some of these issues:

- ✓ **How to manage the loneliness and having to make new friends**
- ✓ **How to deal with the guilt of leaving friends and family behind**
- ✓ **What really is culture shock and how to get through it**

I had all these issues too! I figured out ways to deal with these challenges and I have been helping my clients navigate smoothly in cultural transitions for over 5 years.

I hope this eBook is helpful for you in your international journey - whether you are still preparing or you have already made the move.

ABOUT ME

I am an expat coach and intercultural psychologist.

I am also a seasoned expat, born in Brazil, and lived my childhood in the United States. Throughout the years I have lived, studied, and worked in 5 different countries on 3 continents.

In my many moves, I have experienced successful transitions and many more complete failures.

My own experience, coupled with my observation of other people's experiences, motivated me to search for answers as to why do we sometimes fail and how to succeed when moving to a new culture.

This quest led me to pursue a Master's in Intercultural Psychology and complete a coaching certification and a practitioner certification in NLP. With these tools in hand, I found myself equipped to help expats and expats-to-be overcome the challenges of moving so they can create their best life abroad.

For more about me: www.deborahdahab.com.



EXPAT, DO YOU FEEL THE GUILT?

Carol came in and sat down quickly. She wiped away some drops of rain from her coat and leaned back on the couch. She was looking down and seemed unable or unwilling to look up.

When I asked her how she was, she muttered: “I’m OK.”

She clearly was many things, except OK. After a few moments and a sip of water, she began telling me why she was not OK.

“I should be happy. I’m here in this wonderful place, it was always my dream to live abroad. I have the job of my dreams. Today I talked to my sister and she’s getting married.”



I waited for a few seconds to understand the connection between her not feeling happy and her sister’s wedding.

“She’s my baby sister and I have always wanted to see her get married, choose the wedding dress with her...” Suddenly I could see her eyes watering:

“But I can’t make it. It’s a long flight and I’ve just started this project. I can’t take a whole week off.”

Once she was able to convey this information, I asked her: “How do you feel about missing your sister’s wedding?”

“I feel... well, I guess I feel guilty I can’t be with her.”

There it is: GUILT.

Kudos for Carol and being able say it out loud.

Many of us suffer with it and we’re not even able to name it.

EXPAT, DO YOU FEEL THE GUILT?

From the outside, expat life is glamorous and a constant adventure. Days are filled with excitement, exotic food and drink, and international friends. From the inside, expat life many times is quite different: it can be missing important days like family member's or friend's weddings and birthdays. It's not being able to make it home if a family member gets sick.

The guilt is real, and it creeps up unannounced. When you least expect it, you start to feel uneasy and restless.

People have different ways of dealing with guilt, but I think we can all agree it's a very unpleasant feeling. When you're an expat, you are often outside of your comfort zone and maybe more prone to these feelings.

Here are some tips to deal with this nagging and uncomfortable feeling.

ACKNOWLEDGE IT'S THERE & NAME IT

To deal with something, we must acknowledge it. If Carol had not come to see me, she may have spent weeks with this nagging feeling without really knowing what it really was. I asked her questions that led her to name it. Once you know you're feeling guilty you can start looking into the reasons why and take action.

ENGAGE WITH OTHER EXPATS

Many of these feelings are common among expats because we have similar experiences. We are away from our comfort zone, many times struggling with communication and language, dealing with loneliness, and adjusting to new ways of doing things.

These challenging feelings can get all mixed up and talking to our friends and family back home might not be so effective. Connecting with other expats who are going through similar situations can give you a sense of perspective that is crucial.

EXPAT, DO YOU FEEL THE GUILT?

USE TECHNOLOGY TO YOUR ADVANTAGE

If a family member is sick, talk to them frequently - use zoom, WhatsApp, social media... If feasible, schedule a visit sometime soon. Send them gifts and pictures. Make it a habit to talk to them as often as possible so, even with the distance, you feel close.

If it's a birthday or wedding you have to miss, as Carol did, ask them to connect during the ceremony or party. With a video call, you can even give a toast and speech during the party.



WHAT DID CAROL DO?

Carol decided she was not going to be consumed with the guilt and she came up with a plan: twice a week she met her sister online with pictures of everything: dresses, decorations, flowers, cake design, you name it. They shared the decision making, the challenges and the accomplishments.

During the dress fittings, Carol and her sister Facetimed and she gave all her opinions about the wedding. She even opened a bottle of champagne and drank a glass of bubbly during the toasts while she saw the ceremony on zoom.

After the wedding, I talked to Carol and asked her about the experience.

“Well, of course, it's not the same as being there. But I was with my sister for the decisions and I felt I was part of the process. The most important thing is I didn't fall hostage to the guilt.”

Feeling guilty is normal and it will happen if we're far away from our loved ones. But falling hostage to guilt is a choice and there are ways to deal with it that will give you the chance to be present and still follow your international dreams.

3 TIPS TO OVERCOME CULTURE SHOCK

You've moved to a new country and you're living in a different culture. You might be excited about the new adventure or fearful about what's ahead. Either way, your life is sure to be filled with new emotions. And let's be real: how you deal with these emotions will greatly affect how well you adjust to the new culture.



In general, during the first phase of adjustment, you'll live a great time of enchantment and joy. During this "honeymoon" phase, you'll want to try new food, visit new places and everything will be new. Enjoy this phase as much as you can.

Then, when you least expect it, you'll start to feel a bit restless. It might be the different pace of life, it might be some food from home that you start to really miss. It can be the language that gets you stuck, and you feel you can't communicate properly. It usually starts with small annoyances that become magnified.

The symptoms of culture shock are as varied as people and their specific contexts, but there are some common emotions we all experience: homesickness and frustration over minor issues.

Even if you're a seasoned traveler, you might surprise yourself getting very annoyed at delays and miscommunication.

When you feel these uncomfortable emotions and catch yourself comparing your current life with "life back home" or idealizing how life was before, you are probably in the culture shock phase.

But there's good news: it's normal and there are ways to deal with it. When facing a cultural transition it's normal to feel discomfort at some point.

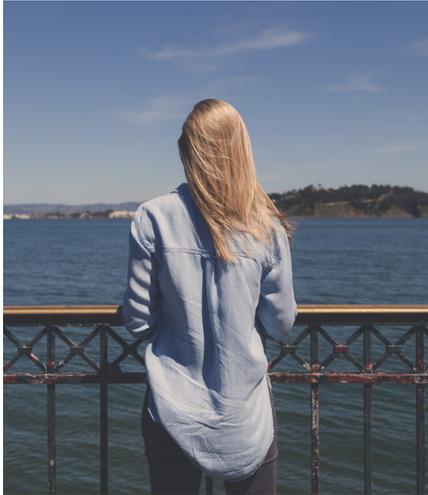


In this article, I'll give you some tips to help you manage this phase so you can live your best life abroad.

3 TIPS TO OVERCOME CULTURE SHOCK

The following tips are pretty simple and straightforward. The key to mastering this phase is to be mindful of your emotions and be consistent in applying the tips.

Tip # 1 - OBSERVE



Give yourself permission to observe without the need to act. Much of our discomfort in this stage comes from the fact that we feel pressure to “do things right”.

Allow yourself time to get acquainted with this new reality without the pressure of **DOING** something. Observe the people and the way they interact; observe the environment and how it affects you; observe how you react to different situations and observe how you feel.

Tip # 2 - ACT

Once you have information through observation, you can act. Decide for yourself what cultural changes you want to embrace and the ones you don't want to. Cultural adjustment is very personal and there might be some changes you just do not want to adopt because they are not aligned with your core values.



Connect with people from your new country and with other expats. Challenge yourself to try new activities and explore new places, flavors, and sights.

Use the new language as much as possible and set yourself realistic language learning goals. For more about setting language learning goals, click [here](#).

3 TIPS TO OVERCOME CULTURE SHOCK

While making new connections is crucial for an integrated adaptation in a new culture, it can be easy to lose touch with meaningful relationships. Friends and family help you stay grounded in times when you are outside of your cultural comfort zone. Find your balance between new friends and maintaining meaningful relationships.

Tip # 3 - REFLECT



Make sense of your experience.

When we don't reflect, we end up going through the motions and failing to get feedback, and learning important lessons. Some people like to journal, others prefer to record audios and other people like to register their observations through photography, painting, music. Take your pick and reflect on what is going well, as well as the things that you want to make changes.

Then, when you least expect it, you will start to feel more like "yourself" again and find a new space you can call a "new normal". This "new normal" is an internal place that is more comfortable, where you feel more confident and stronger.

3 MISTAKES EXPATS MAKE (and how to avoid them)

As an intercultural psychologist and expat coach, I have heard a lot of people's experiences about moving abroad. I have narrowed it down to 3 mistakes expats frequently make. I also give some suggestions to deal with the issues so you don't get trapped in them too.

Mistake #1

"I've lived abroad before; I'm used to it and it's going to be easy".

You've traveled a lot, have lived abroad, and therefore believe you are immune to all the emotional upheaval of cultural adjustment. You might be one of the few that adjust well no matter where and when. But if you're like most of us, throughout your life things change, and our priorities are different.

Ultimately, we're not the same throughout the years. What does that mean? It means that when we lived abroad as a single person our challenges are different than as a couple moving internationally.

If you have children, there are different challenges altogether. If you're an empty nester, there are no children around and priorities shift yet again.



Besides all these changes, your financial or professional situation might be different, the country you're moving to is possibly one where you have never lived before.

Having lived abroad before gives you experience and can be an advantage. However, previous experiences can also create expectations that prevent you from living fully in the present moment in this new country.

My suggestion is to take stock of the lessons from past experiences knowing that today you are in a different situation and probably have different priorities- don't let the "I know it all" belief prevent you from facing the beauty and challenges of your current international move.

Mistake #2



“This is my chance to start fresh and leave all the problems behind”

This might be unconscious and take a while for you to acknowledge it. The thing about this mistake where we focus our attention: when we position ourselves as fleeing or avoiding something we are, unconsciously, putting our attention on exactly what we want to avoid.

Many times, the issues we face in life – regardless of where we are – are all about how we deal with the challenges we are presented with.

Also, the problems are usually within us and moving countries doesn't change anything. It might even make the problems worse because we're so out of our comfort zone.

Access with brutal honesty what you are trying to avoid and re-frame it into a positive view. Be realistic about your motives for moving.

Mistake #3

“The most important thing is to deal with the logistics”

Having a roof over your head and the papers in order is crucial. But preparing emotionally is equally important and frequently overlooked when preparing for an international period abroad.

Understanding your objectives, what you gain, and lose with your move is critical for a smooth transition. Knowing the reasons why you decided to move are important because it will determine your mindset, and your mindset can set you up for failure or success. It all depends on how conscious you are of it.

I suggest you be clear about your objectives with the move. Know what you gain and lose from the move. What do you want to move for? What do you want to accomplish?

HOW TO PREPARE TO MOVE ABROAD

When we are preparing for an international assignment, it is common to focus on all the things that must be done, and all the logistics behind a big international move. We tend to put all our attention on what to take with us.

However, moving internationally requires a certain degree of disposition to be able to detach. Distances, both physical and emotional, will be greater and it is better to face head-on the fact that there are many things that we will have to move on from.

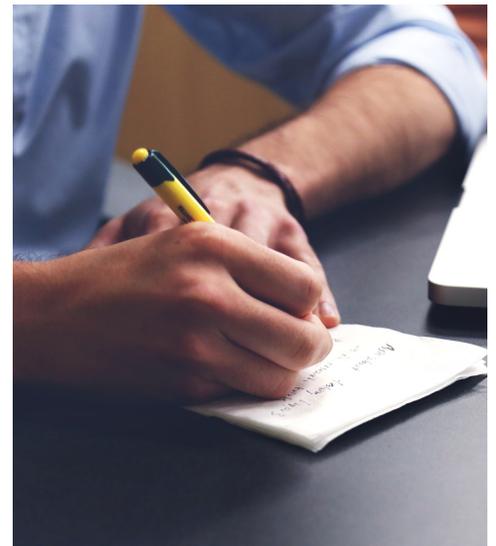
Saying goodbye can be painful and it should be dealt with before the move and in a conscious manner. Avoiding goodbyes may prevent hardship in the present but it will likely come back when you least expect it and magnify some of the challenges of cultural adjustment.

Here you'll find three tips on things to have closure and detach from when preparing for a cultural change.

1

Make a list of your favorite places & say goodbye

I don't know about you, but I have favorite restaurants and coffee shops. Some places I love for the food and other places I have emotional memories of because it's where I celebrated birthdays or had happy hours with friends. It's important to acknowledge that these places are part of our life and say your goodbyes. Before moving, go there one last time and savor the place. Take pictures and remember the good things that happened there.



2

Say proper goodbyes to friends and family

This one is important. Really. Important. Whether you decide to have a goodbye party or not (even if on zoom) it's important to say heartfelt goodbyes to close friends and family. They are part of your life and will likely be a source of comfort when the challenges of culture adjustment kick in. It's important not to underestimate the importance of the people who really know you and how instrumental they can be in helping you through your culture transition.

Think of ways to stay connected, either through online chats or video calls. It is common to feel quite lonely during the phase when you don't feel like a tourist anymore, but you're still not fully adjusted in your new culture.

Social support is crucial and keeping in touch with your closest friends and family can be the make or break factor in being successfully able to overcome the challenges of culture shock.



Write a list of what you are leaving behind

This one is hard. It's not easy to internally say goodbye. But as with the other tips, it's important to be conscious of the process of change so you can come out the other end fully embracing the new culture. It's not to say you'll forget about your past and relationships. Not at all. This exercise aims to bring to consciousness what you are leaving behind so your life in the past is not idealized. The list can be as long as you like and should include all aspects of life.

It's important to be conscious of what you will not take with you. For some people, it can be physical objects, for others it's all about relationships, it might be about places like the gym, or even a favorite bookstore.

It might seem gruesome to make these lists and go through these negative emotions.

Facing these emotions ultimately will make you more aware of your strengths and the better you prepare and deal with these issues, the more equipped you'll be to navigate through some of the high tides of culture shock.

NO EMERGENCY CONTACT

Claire was distraught.

She came into the session shaken and for several minutes couldn't even articulate what had happened. After some minutes, I could see some tears come down her cheek. "I did not imagine this could happen. Not in a million years." She spoke softly while taking some small sips of water.

After some breathing exercises to calm down a bit, Claire began to explain what was going on.

She had gone to a clinic to get a checkup and the doctor recommended some tests. In one of the tests, she'd be put under and the clinic asked for someone to be her emergency contact. And it hit her. She did not have one.

Claire was an expat in a foreign country. She had left her home country to start a new position in her company. It was the opportunity of a lifetime and at the same time experience a new culture, new environments. She was thrilled.

Being single was also a plus since she didn't have to deal with accommodating a partner's needs and she could do her own thing. It couldn't get better than that. Right?



When she realized that in the six months she'd been in her new position she had worked herself to exhaustion, met many people but had almost no real friends and ended up with chronic headaches, that wasn't at all what she had imagined how her time abroad would be like.

And to top it off, she felt a blow in the stomach when she could not think of a single person she could write down as an emergency contact.

NO EMERGENCY CONTACT

These issues are a lot more common than you'd think.

When we decide to take an international assignment and plan our trip abroad, the logistics and practical issues take a front seat. We rarely know the typical phases of cultural adjustment and how to prepare for potential pitfalls.

We rarely articulate our underlying intentions and identify potentially fatal mistakes.

We rarely prepare ourselves emotionally and have a strategy to structure our adjustment in the new culture. And then we ask ourselves why sh*t happens...

Claire didn't prepare her departure but she very quickly identified she needed help to understand how to deal objectively with the challenges of cultural transition.

She searched for help and after her coaching sessions she was able to articulate the issue, set her goals and set an action plan to achieve it. She became equipped with the knowledge and awareness of the impact of her decisions in the many different areas of her life.

Having this structured approach to the adjustment made her aware that winging it does not work and the emotional costs were quite high. She was able to reverse the process and start creating her new reality with goals and boundaries.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS ABROAD



I had arrived about a week ago and the rain was relentless for all the seven days I was there.

After the first few days, I had unpacked and was ready to start my classes for the exchange program at the University.

But then I started to feel the sore throat, the ache all over my body, and I only wanted to stay in bed and sleep. And then the fever started. Coughing, sneezing.

I felt extremely sick. I'm not sure what was worse, the aching body or the idea of having to leave my bed to find a doctor.

Somehow, I managed to call the University and get the address of the clinic. I really don't know how I did that given my broken French and hoarse voice.

I got to the doctor's office dictionary in hand because I had no idea how to tell her I had a sore throat (this was pre-smartphone and pre-google translate).

Medication in hand, I headed home feeling extremely lonely. Being sick is not fun in normal situations and when you've just arrived in a foreign country the feeling of vulnerability can be debilitating.

What if I have to go to the hospital? What if I can't understand a word they say?

These fears started to echo in my mind as I entered the tiny apartment, took off my damp shoes, and crawled into bed.

Then the phone rang. It was Guillaume. I had forgotten about him. He was my assigned buddy. The University had a buddy program to help foreign students, and I had forgotten about him.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS ABROAD

“Hello”, he said with the thickest French accent you can imagine.

“Hi”, I muttered.

“How are you? I wanted to see if you needed anything” he replied, happy to practice his English skills.

“Well, I don't feel so good...I just came back from the doctor's office. I have a bad sore throat.” I replied in a very low voice.

“I'll come over and bring you soup.” Guillaume replied.

Guillaume brought me soup and so much more. He brought me friendship and care. He was crucial for my fast recovery and being able to adjust to French life. He was my first friend at the University, and I am forever grateful.

Having friends when we're abroad is critical for us to have a successful adjustment. When we're outside of our comfort zone it is very important to share our struggle with people that really understand us.

If you don't have an assigned buddy to help you with your cultural adjustment, there are a few things you can do to find friends when abroad.

Start before you leave

Your cultural transition does not start when you hop on the plane or when you land at your destination. It starts when you decide to move. So, start connecting with people before you move.

With social media, it's easy to exchange ideas, have a conversation, and find people to connect with. Don't limit yourself to writing messages. Talk to them in video chat to make the experience more meaningful.

Before you leave for your destination, have at least three coffee or lunch scheduled.



You get what you give

If you want to have friends abroad it's important to be a friend. When we're in another culture we have to make friends from scratch. It can be exciting to meet new and different people, but it can also be draining to tell our story dozens of times to strangers.

An easy way to make new and meaningful friendships is to give people your attention. If necessary, go out of your way to help someone that needs your help - sometimes with simple things like picking up groceries, giving them a call just to check on them.

You will see that when we give people attention, we will receive it back.

Dare to befriend the unfamiliar

In our international journey, we will probably meet people that are very different from what we'd meet back home. Try not to dismiss potential friendships based on past experiences.

If back home your friends all worked, be open to making friends with a student. If back home your friends had kids, be open to making friends with people with no kids. You get the idea.

Also, open up to other nationalities. When we're out of our comfort zone, sometimes we search the company of people from our home country because they "get us". While that is true, it can also be limiting.

Having friends that help you and bring you soup when you're sick can be the difference between having a successful cultural adjustment or struggling to feel happy in your new culture. It takes time and effort, but it is totally worth the investment.

Preparing or dealing with an international move can be hard. It can be tough and take a lot of our energy.

Being constantly out of our comfort zone can be draining. But ultimately if you've made a conscious choice to move you're brave enough to master the challenges.

All you need is the knowledge of what typically happens and the tools to deal with these most common challenges.

One of the most important things about being an expat and going through a cultural transition is knowing that you're not alone. Once you master the tools to understand and deal with the challenges, you'll get through the other end a better, stronger, and more fascinating person.

I have helped countless expats like you, who are preparing for your move abroad, and those who have been struggling with adjustment after the move.

I will be happy to talk to you on a free call to see how you can create your best life abroad. You can book your free session [here](#).

If you're preparing for your move abroad and you want a step by step system so you can move with ease and confidence, take a look at this e-course: <https://bit.ly/34zmIH6>

I'm here for you! Get in touch and let's talk!

With gratitude,

Deborah



www.deborahdahab.com