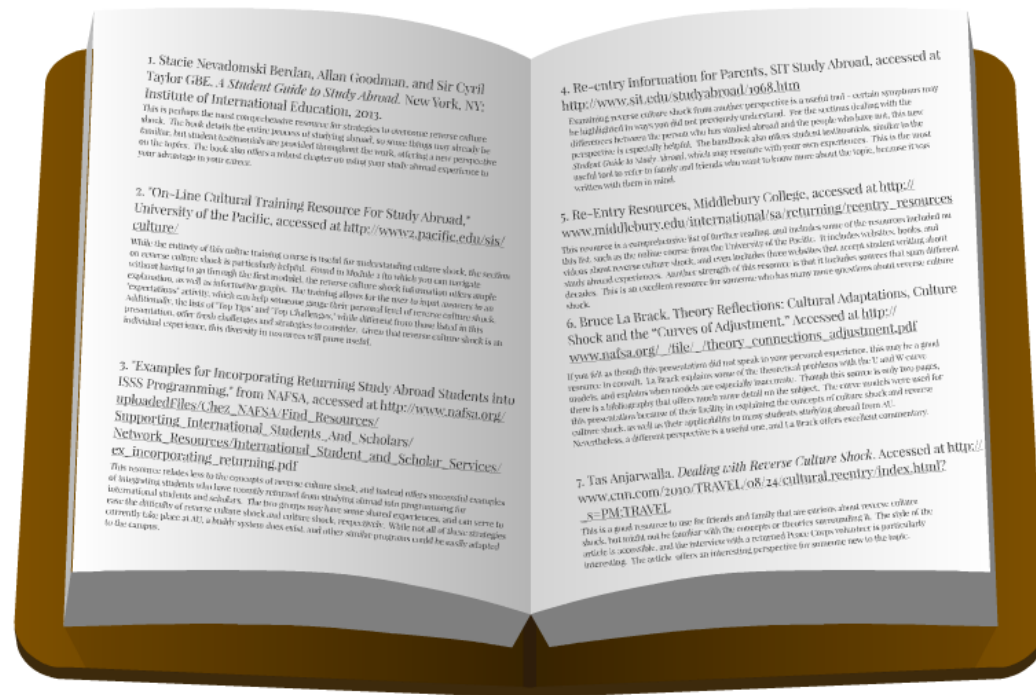




Reverse culture shock can be thought of as a second U, making the entire diagram a W Curve.



Next, take a look at these resources - they'll offer more information on the topics discussed here, as well as different strategies for overcoming reverse culture shock. Some resources are especially suited to sharing with family and friends.

# Reverse Culture Shock: Overcoming the Difficulty of Reentry

An Honors Capstone in the School of International  
Service, American University, Spring 2014

Advisor: Professor Sherry Lee Mueller, Ph.D

By Carlyn Brophy Messenger





**Your study abroad experience might have been...**

Lonely  
Eye-Opening  
Hard  
New  
Fun  
Easy  
Scary  
Discouraging  
Social  
Inspiring  
Valuable  
Sad  
Broadening  
Disorienting  
Overwhelming  
Wonderful  
Confusing  
Enriching  
Amazing  
Exhausting  
Surprising  
Transformative  
Frustrating  
Engaging  
Isolating  
Welcoming

...So coming home might feel a little empty.




Thankfully,  
you'll have  
help!

# ***This Presentation Will:***

- ~ Explain the key concepts of reverse culture shock.
- ~ Describe what those concepts might feel like in practice.
- ~ Give some tips on overcoming reverse culture shock, and reentering your home country.
- ~ Recommend further reading and resources.

*Sound good? Then let's begin.*

*Sound good? Then let's begin.*



# Culture shock and reverse culture shock – what are they?

# Let's explore it visually.

Your whole life, you've worn glasses that  
make the world look yellow.



Your whole life, you've worn glasses that  
make the world look yellow.





This is not a bad thing! This is simply  
the world as you know it.

Suddenly, studying abroad in a new place allows you to put on another pair of glasses, lenses through which you see the world.

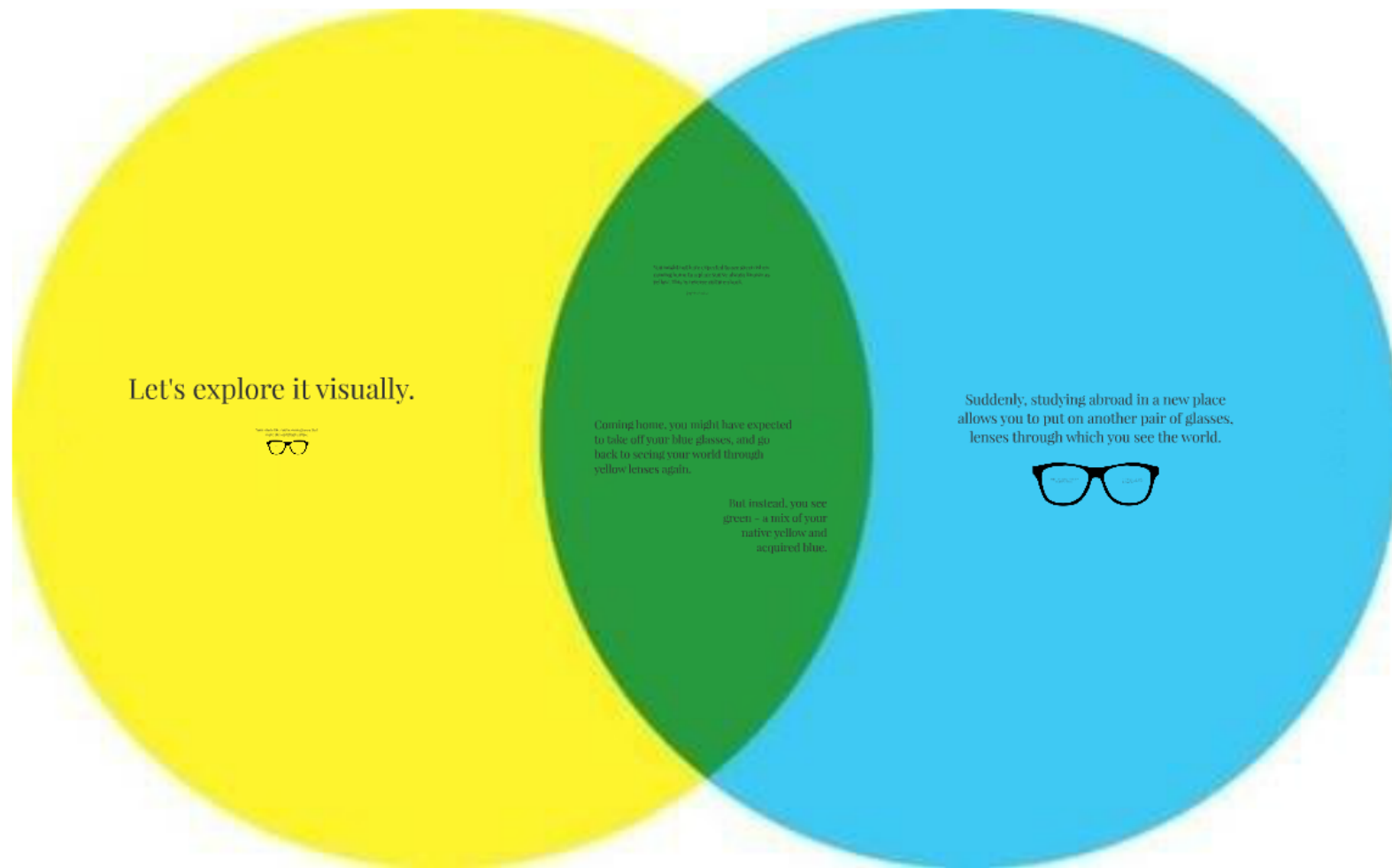


Is blue better or worse than yellow?  
No, it's just different.

At first, seeing the world with blue lenses is scary,  
or frustrating – why can't everything just be yellow?  
But after some time, you begin to appreciate seeing  
the world with blue lenses.

This is culture shock.

This is culture shock.



But when you come home, you'll have 2 sets of glasses – yellow that you've always had, and blue which you acquired abroad.

Coming home, you might have expected to take off your blue glasses, and go back to seeing your world through yellow lenses again.

But instead, you see  
green – a mix of

1.

But instead, you see  
green – a mix of your  
native yellow and  
acquired blue.



You might not have expected to see green when coming home to a place you've always known as yellow. This is reverse culture shock.

Many report that reverse culture shock is worse than culture shock, because they did not expect it to happen.

Many report that reverse culture shock is worse than culture shock, because they did not expect it to happen.



Let's review definitions:  
what is reverse  
culture shock?

And how is it related to culture shock?



Culture shock is "the confusion, disorientation, and emotional upheaval that comes from immersion in a new culture."

From "A Student Guide to Study Abroad," Stacie Nevadomski Berdan, Allan Goodman, and Sir Cyril Taylor GBE, published by the Institute of International Education, 2013



# Culture shock is often represented by the "U Curve."

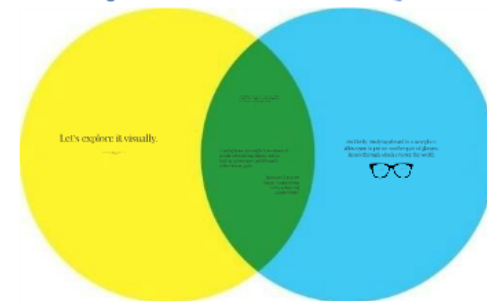
The "honeymoon period," at the beginning of your time abroad describes the positive feelings you might have about your new experiences – the differences are seen as positive things.



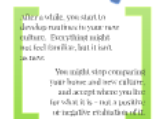
Thankfully, you'll have help!



Culture shock and reverse culture shock – what are they?



As time goes on, you might become homesick, and start to draw comparisons between home and the new culture in which you live. You can become easily frustrated with the new culture, and start to reject it. In the U curve model, this is the lowest point of the U – the time at which culture shock may feel the worst.



Let's explore it visually. What is reverse culture shock?

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But when y  
that you've





After a while, you start to develop routines in your new culture. Everything might not feel familiar, but it isn't as new.

You might stop comparing your home and new culture, and accept where you live



culture. Everything might not feel familiar, but it isn't as new.

You might stop comparing your home and new culture, and accept where you live for what it is – not a positive or negative evaluation of it.

After your semester or year ends,  
and your study abroad experience  
comes to a close, you must return  
home.



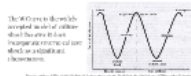


This is when reverse culture shock occurs.

It is important to remember that the experiences of culture shock and reverse culture shock depend on individual circumstances. Each person has a unique experience when departing and reentering their home country.

That being said, there are certain common signs of reverse culture shock, and tips to overcome it.

Remember the U curve of culture shock?



Let's review some of the problems of reverse culture shock, and then consider tips on how to overcome

# Unique experience when departing their home country.

That being said, there are certain common signs of reverse culture shock, and tips to overcome it.

Remember the U curve of culture shock?

The W Curve is the widely accepted model of culture shock because it does incorporate reverse culture shock as a significant phenomenon.



Image source: <https://www.internexchange.org/us/eeet-training/usa-reverse-culture-shock-100179>

Let's review some of the problems of reverse culture shock, and then

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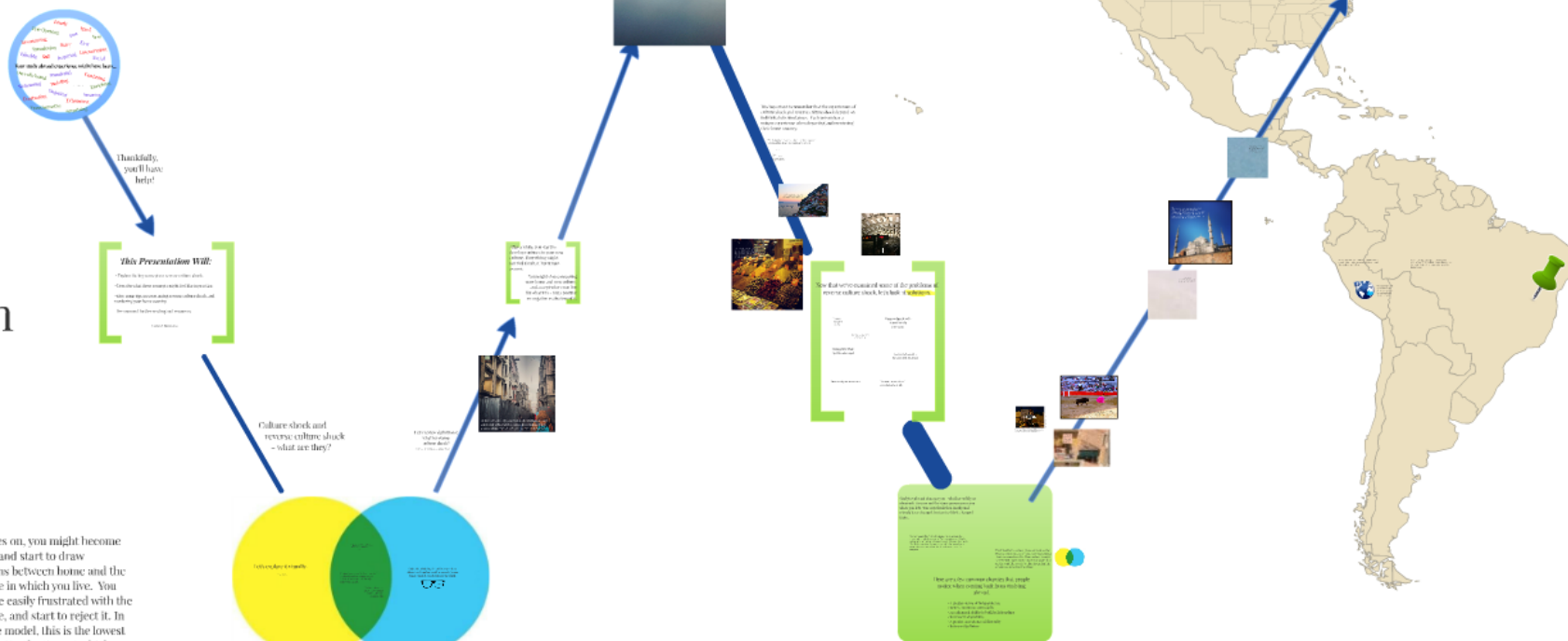


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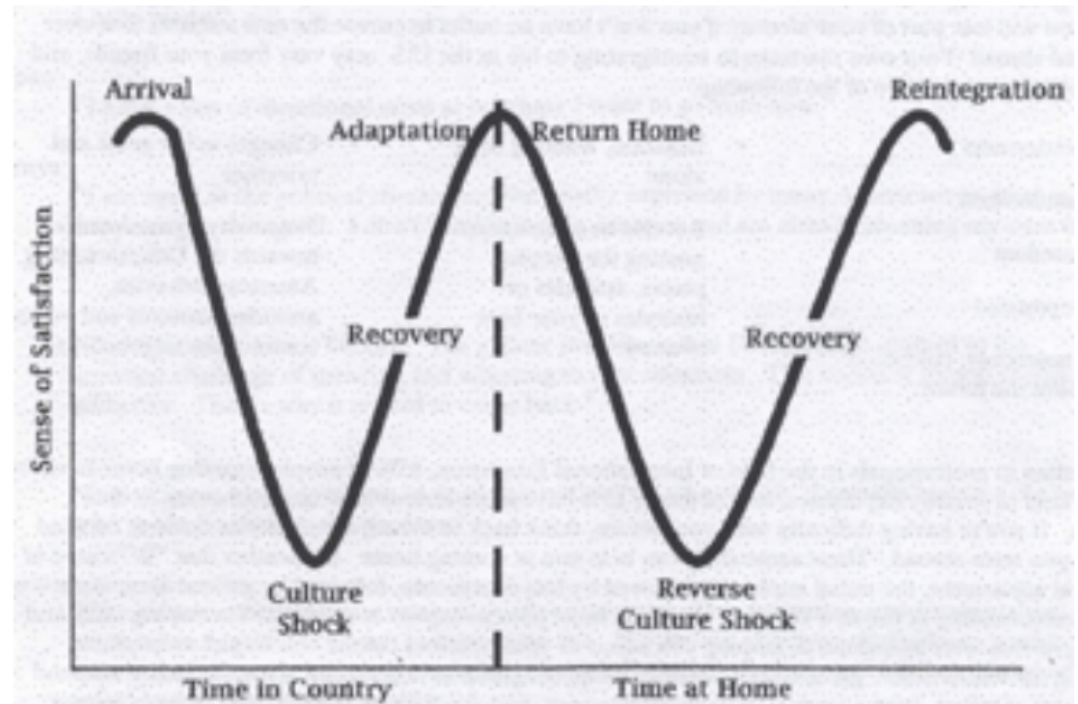



Image source: <http://www.interexchange.org/career-training-usa/reverse-culture-shock-reentry>

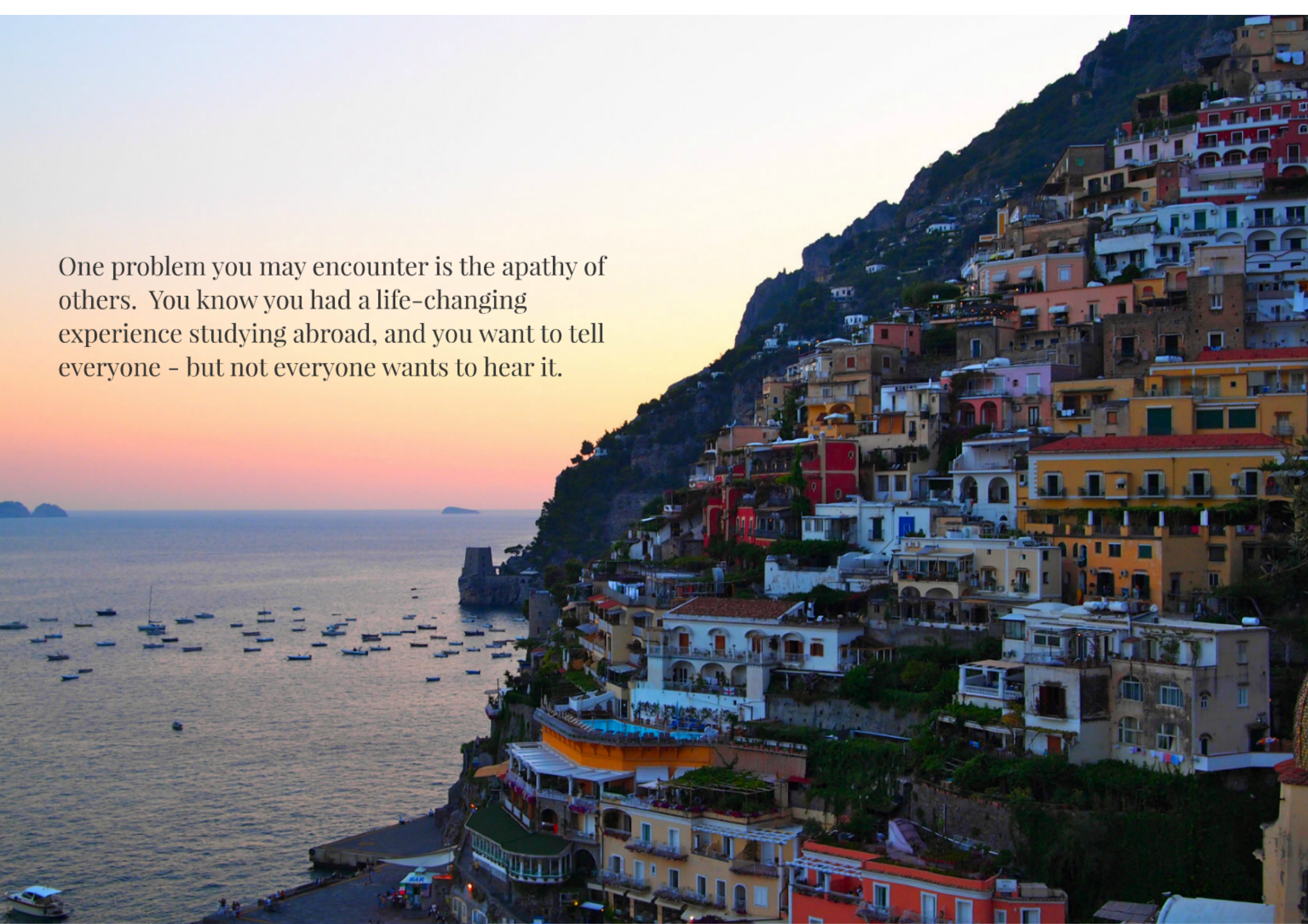
Let's review some of the problem



A large blue triangle is positioned on the left side of the slide, pointing towards the bottom right corner.

Let's review some of the problems of  
reverse culture shock, and then  
consider tips on how to overcome  
them.

One problem you may encounter is the apathy of others. You know you had a life-changing experience studying abroad, and you want to tell everyone - but not everyone wants to hear it.

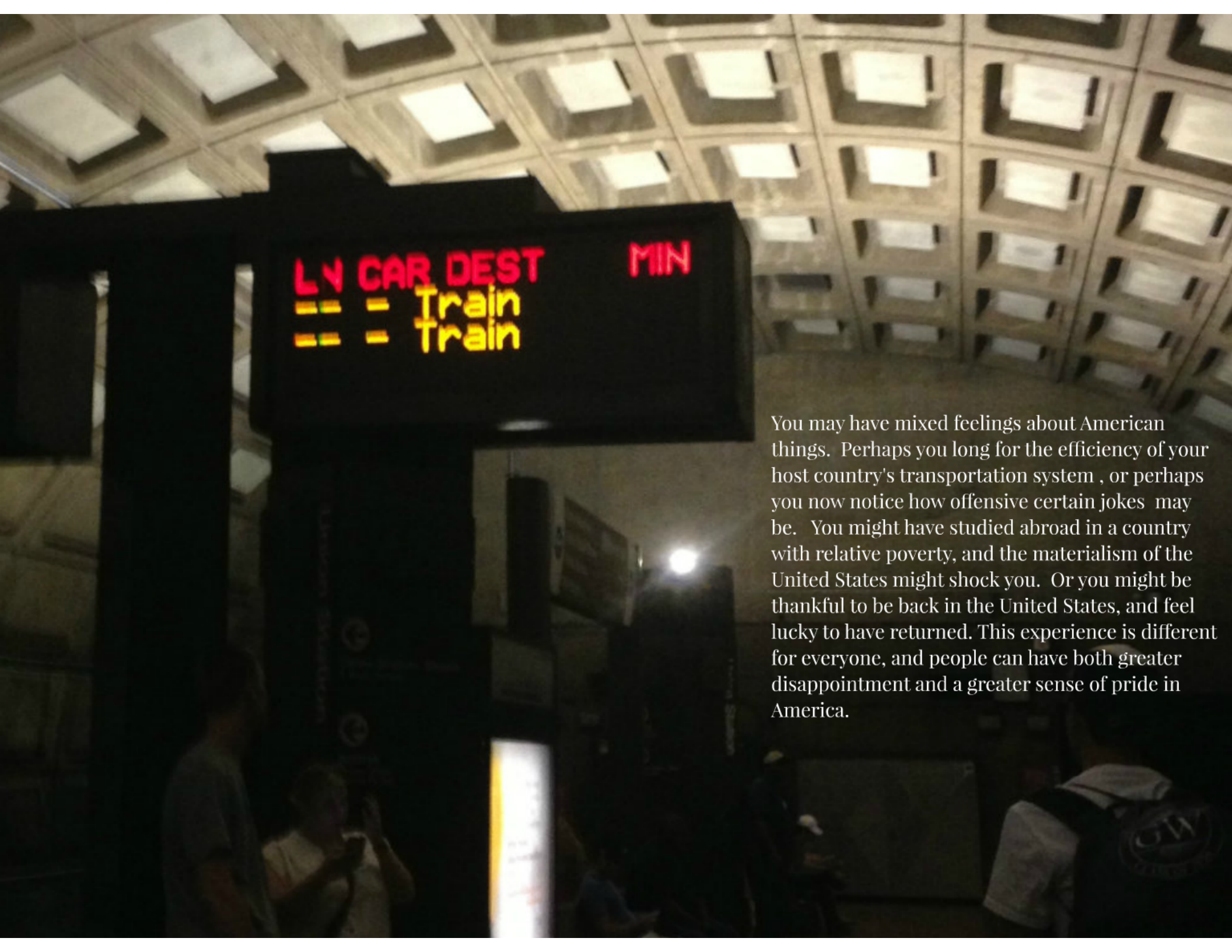




Another problem you might encounter is your own apathy – nothing at home seems as exciting as it once did. Even simple tasks while abroad were challenging, but at home, nothing offers the same experience. You miss the constant stimulation of being abroad.







You may have mixed feelings about American things. Perhaps you long for the efficiency of your host country's transportation system , or perhaps you now notice how offensive certain jokes may be. You might have studied abroad in a country with relative poverty, and the materialism of the United States might shock you. Or you might be thankful to be back in the United States, and feel lucky to have returned. This experience is different for everyone, and people can have both greater disappointment and a greater sense of pride in America.



Now that we've examined some of the problems of reverse culture shock, let's look at solutions.

Learn to  
tell a good  
story.

Keep in touch with  
your friends  
overseas.


Prepare to experience  
culture shock.

Learn to  
tell a good  
story.

When experiencing reverse culture shock, you may encounter apathy from others about your time abroad. One way to counter that problem is to become a good storyteller. That way, the limited time that others pay attention to your stories of life abroad will be mutually beneficial – you will want to tell your stories, and they will want to hear them.







To tell your stories, use emotion, body language, and emphasis - make the story come alive! For example, when telling of learning to cook abroad, describe the flavors and smells, and demonstrate the techniques with your hands!



A long-exposure photograph of the Colosseum in Rome at night. The ancient amphitheater is illuminated with warm, golden lights, highlighting its iconic arches. In the foreground, a woman with blonde hair, wearing a red and white striped shirt and dark pants, is captured in a dynamic pose, leaning back with her arms outstretched. The street in front of the Colosseum shows light trails from passing vehicles, adding a sense of motion to the scene.

Develop a repertoire of stories, like "My 20th birthday in Rome," or "Shopping at the market for the first time." Make sure to include a lesson you learned, or a takeaway – it will make for a more memorable story. You'll have a lot of stories. There's no way you can tell them all – so pick your favorites, and perfect them!

Make sure to avoid common phrases that bore listeners. Telling someone you had "the time of your life" will mean little, but explaining yourself in an interesting way will make for a story that sticks.

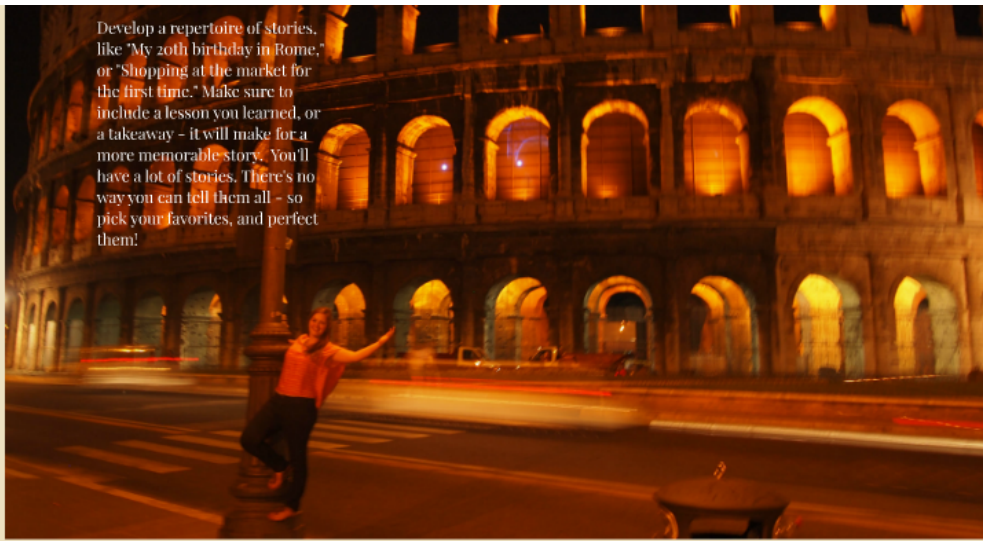


You should also try to make the story relevant for the listener! Striking a common chord and making the moral of the story appropriate for your listener will keep them engaged in what you have to say.





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Now that you've perfected your favorite stories, it's time to explore other tips!






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Prepare to experience  
culture shock.

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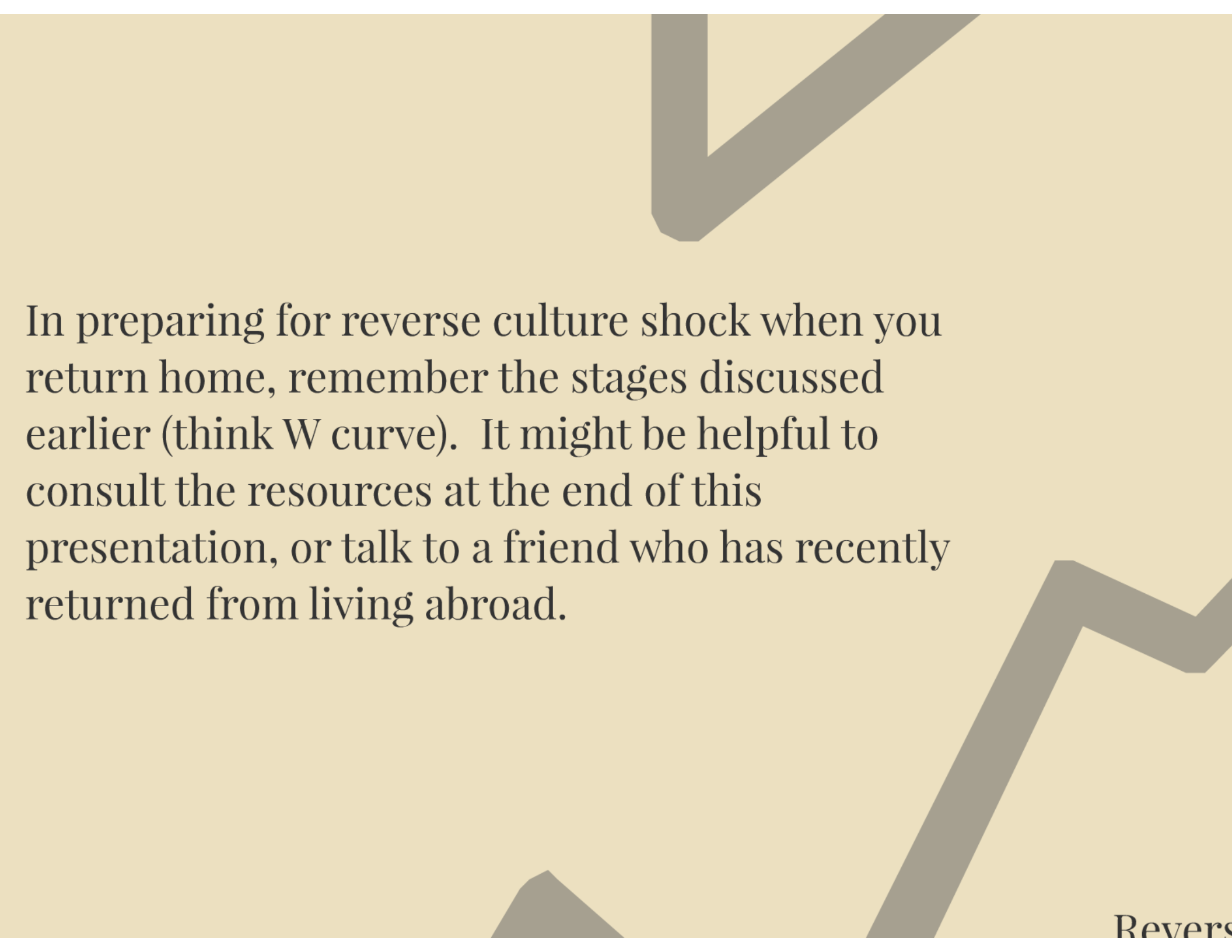


Reverse culture shock is worse than culture shock, because people don't expect to have it. One solution can be to fully expect it – just being aware of reverse culture shock can make it easier to overcome.



As found in *A Student Guide to Study Abroad*, "With reverse culture shock, you feel out of place in your own country, and that sensation is generally more fundamentally disorienting than feeling out of place overseas, where you are, in fact, out of place."




The background features several large, thick, grey geometric shapes. In the top right, there is a large 'V' shape pointing downwards. In the bottom right, there is a jagged, mountain-like shape. In the bottom left, there is a smaller, solid grey triangle.

In preparing for reverse culture shock when you return home, remember the stages discussed earlier (think W curve). It might be helpful to consult the resources at the end of this presentation, or talk to a friend who has recently returned from living abroad.



Prepare to experience  
culture shock.

Recognize that  
you've changed.

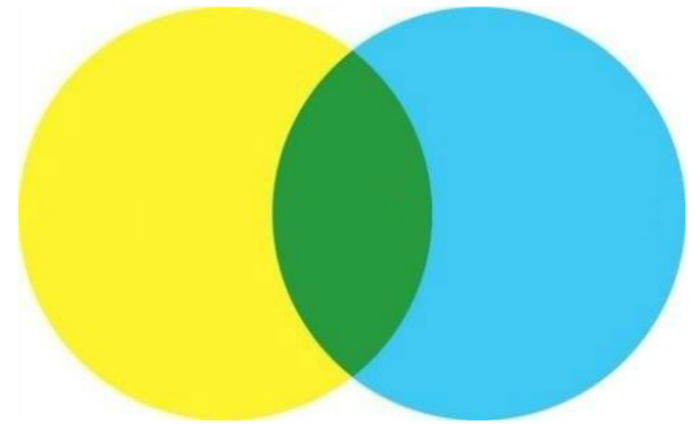


Studying abroad changes you – whether subtly or obviously. You are not the same person you were when you left. You may think that family and friends have changed, but you've likely changed more.

How can recognizing that you've changed make overcoming reverse culture shock any easier? Try being patient with family

Think back to the colored glasses example earlier. When coming home, you'll have your green glasses – but everyone else will still have yellow. It might be difficult for you to understand why people don't see the world like you do, but they haven't had the experience of wearing blue glasses.

anges that people  
from studying



see the world like you do, but they haven't  
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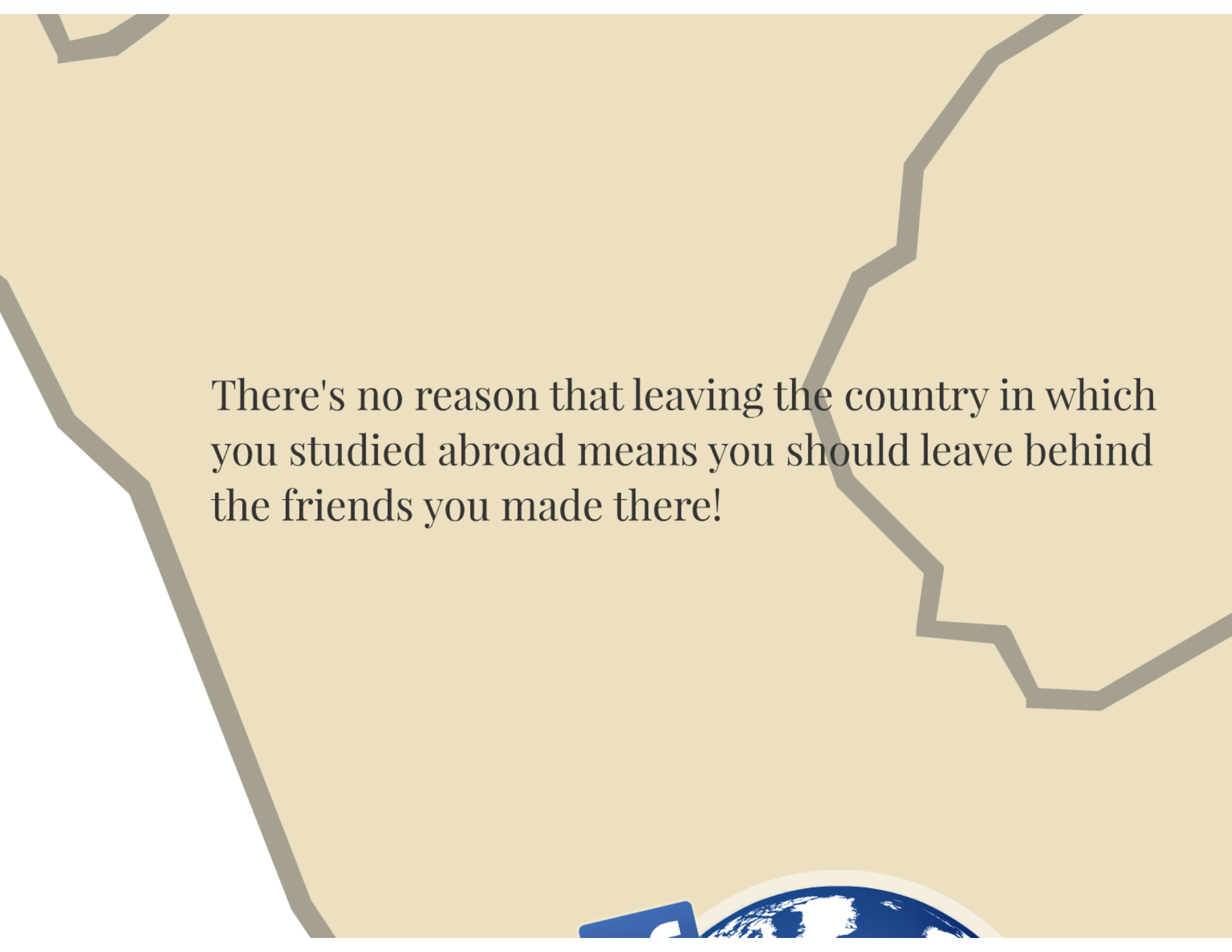
Here are a few common changes that people  
notice when coming back from studying  
abroad.

- A greater sense of independence
- Better communication skills
- An enhanced ability to build relationships
- Increased adaptability
- A greater acceptance of diversity
- Increased patience

more.

How can recognizing that you've changed make overcoming reverse culture shock any easier? Try being patient with family and friends, and explain to them why you feel the way that you do. They'll also recognize changes in you, and by having an honest conversation, reverse culture shock can be made easier for everyone.

Keep in touch with  
your friends  
overseas.



There's no reason that leaving the country in which  
you studied abroad means you should leave behind  
the friends you made there!

friends you made there!



With so many social media tools at our disposal, it's easy to keep in touch with friends overseas.

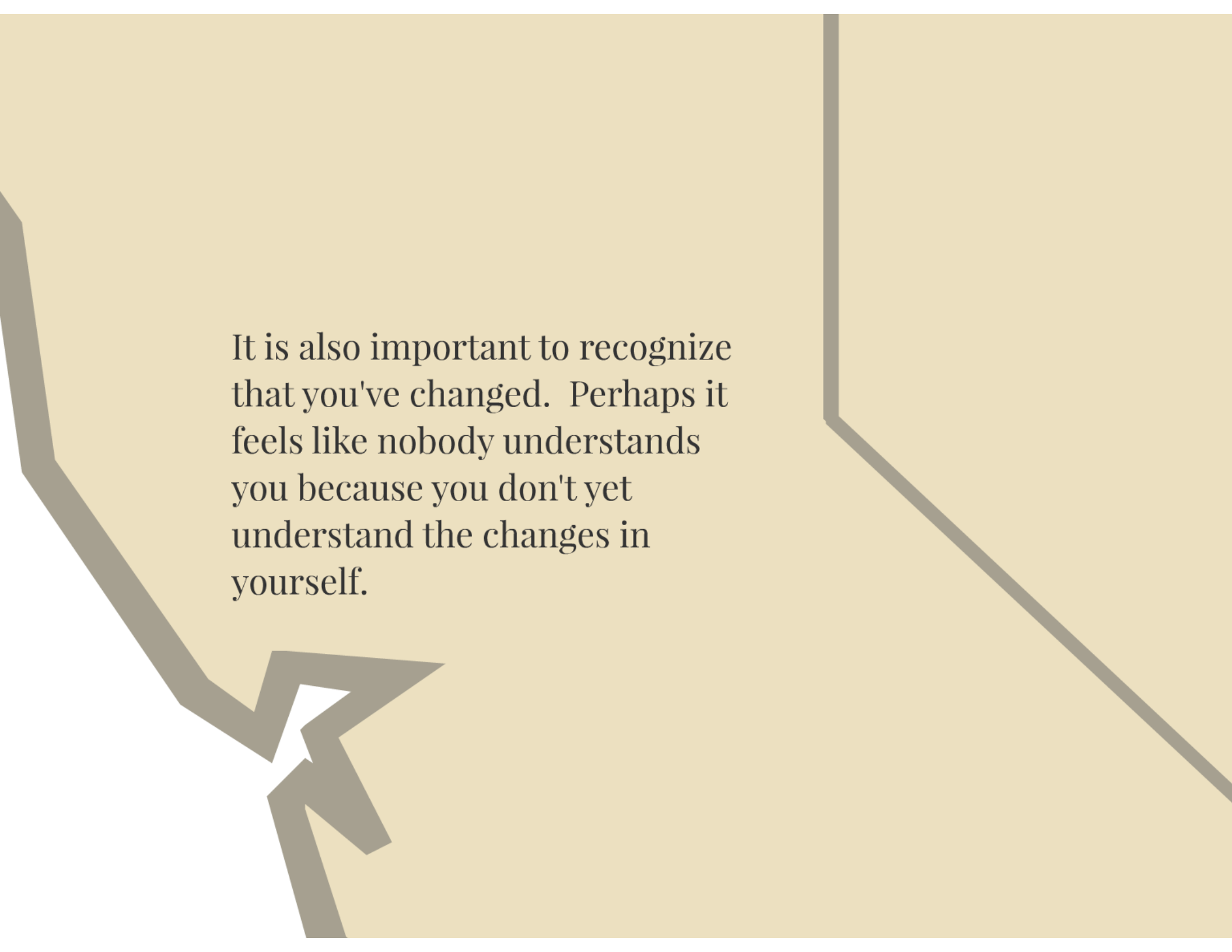


In the beginning, you might feel as though you need to talk to your friends overseas constantly. As this need subsides, let it – you're adjusting to life back at home.



Seek out others who  
have recently returned.

As you remember, one of the problems of culture shock is feeling as though nobody understands you. It's similar for reverse culture shock too – people who don't have a shared experience might find it difficult to understand the changes in you.

The background is a solid beige color. It features several abstract grey lines: a vertical line on the right side, a diagonal line extending from the top right towards the bottom right, and a complex, jagged line on the left side that forms a shape resembling a stylized arrow or a corner. The text is positioned in the upper left quadrant of the image.

It is also important to recognize that you've changed. Perhaps it feels like nobody understands you because you don't yet understand the changes in yourself.

One way to feel understood is to talk with someone who has been in your situation – a friend, recently returned from overseas. It's likely that to some degree, they experienced what you're going through.

Perhaps they were abroad in the same place with you, or maybe they've been back for more than a year. Either way, finding someone that shares part of your experience can be comforting, and a little empathy can go a long way.

Document your memories.





There are certain experiences you have while studying abroad that you can't replicate back at home. This is part of the magic of studying abroad!





<http://vimeo.com/27244727>


Documenting your memories may be a helpful way to appreciate your experiences in a meaningful way. Reflecting on the things you learned can help you to process them, and move on.



LEARN

You Tube



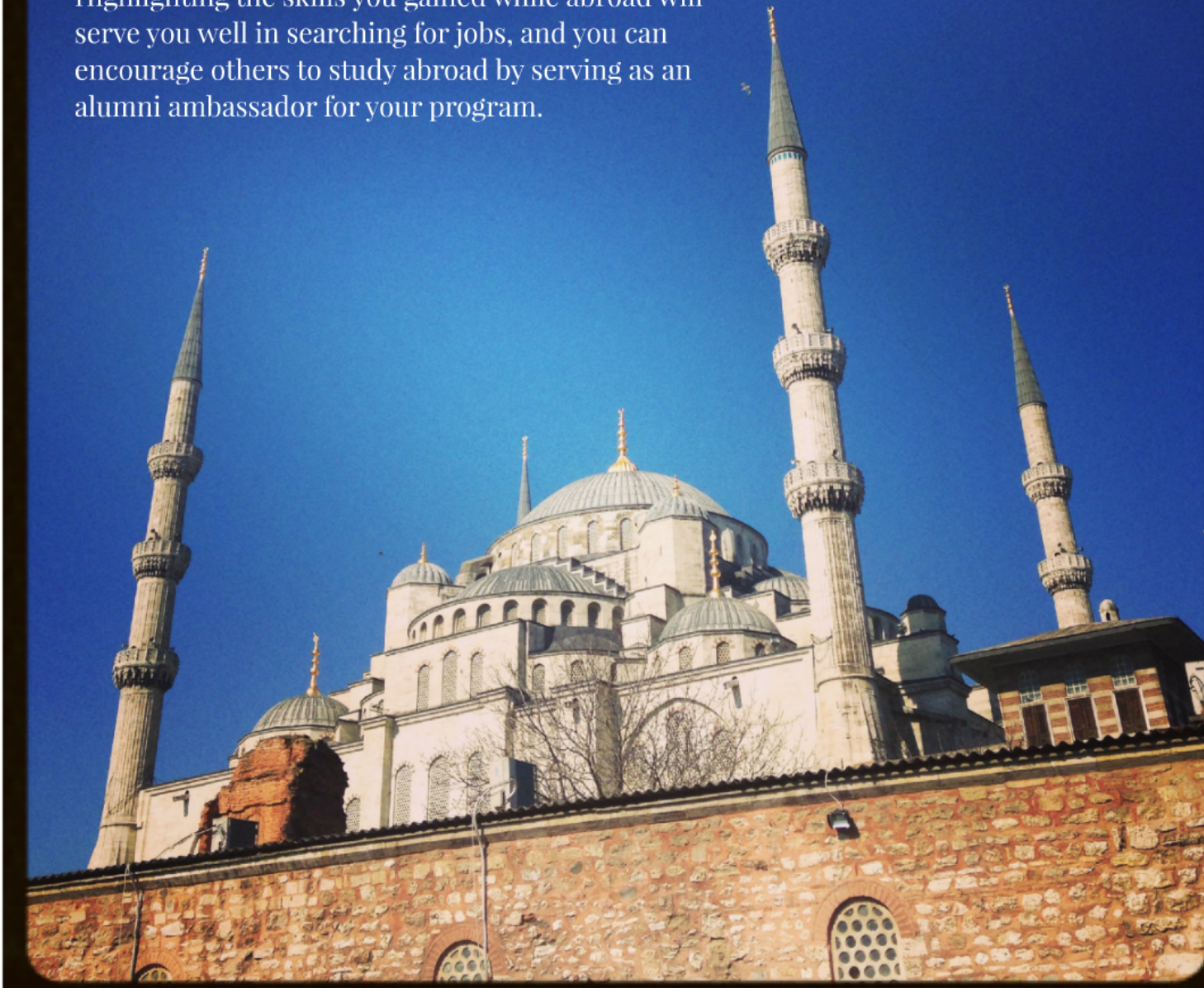
An aerial photograph of St. Peter's Square in Rome, Italy. The square is a large, elliptical plaza with a central obelisk and a radial pattern of streets. It is surrounded by a curved colonnade of white columns. In the background, the dense urban landscape of Rome is visible, with numerous buildings and a clear blue sky. A semi-transparent pink box with white text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

Try keeping a journal, or collecting photos and videos. Sometimes taping little items – like receipts or wrappers – into a journal can be a nice reminder of your favorite places when you were studying abroad. Videos are an increasingly popular way to document your experiences – and can easily be shared with friends.

Put your international  
experience to work.



There are many ways to use your international experience now that you're back at home. Highlighting the skills you gained while abroad will serve you well in searching for jobs, and you can encourage others to study abroad by serving as an alumni ambassador for your program.





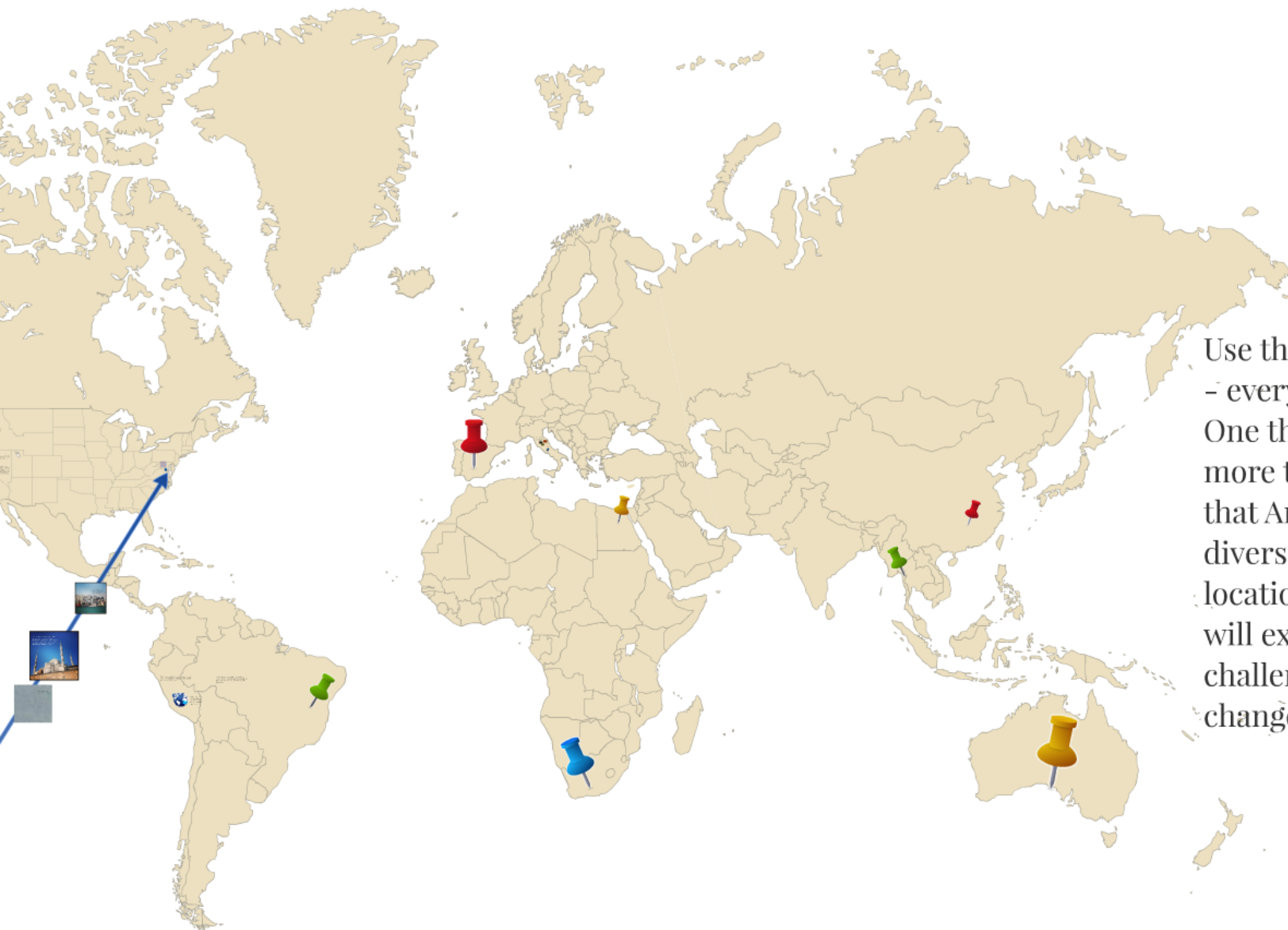
Experience working in a multicultural environment is a highly marketable skill. Identify the lessons you learned and skills you gained while studying abroad, and incorporate them into your resume.





Sharing your study abroad experience as a student ambassador can be a good way to overcome reverse culture shock. You'll be able to meet students who are interested in hearing your stories, and you can reflect on your experiences - both positive and negative. Giving an honest account of your time abroad can help other students prepare.






Use these tips, but remember  
- every experience is unique.  
One thing might apply to you  
more than another. The fact  
that American University has  
diverse study abroad  
locations means students  
will experience different  
challenges, experiences, and  
changes.

This presentation has covered  
what to expect from re  
how to overcome some

challenges, experiences, and  
changes.

This presentation has offered you guidance on  
what to expect from reverse culture shock, and  
how to overcome some of its challenges.

A dark brown, textured horizontal bar at the top of the slide, with a slightly wavy, torn-edge appearance.

Next, take a look at these resources – they'll offer more information on the topics discussed here, as well as different strategies for overcoming reverse culture shock. Some resources are especially suited to sharing with family and friends.

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This is perhaps the most comprehensive resource for strategies to overcome reverse culture shock. The book details the entire process of studying abroad, so some things may already be familiar, but student testimonials are provided throughout the work, offering a new perspective on the topics. The book also offers a robust chapter on using your study abroad experience to your advantage in your career.

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While the entirety of this online training course is useful for understanding culture shock, the section on reverse culture shock is particularly helpful. Found in Module 2 (to which you can navigate without having to go through the first module), the reverse culture shock section provides a clear explanation, as well as informative graphics and testimonials.



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3. "Examples for Incorporating Returning Study Abroad Students into  
ISSS Programming," from NAFSA, accessed at [http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/Chez\\_NAFSA/Find\\_Resources/Supporting\\_International\\_Students\\_And\\_Scholars/Network\\_Resources/International\\_Students\\_and\\_Scholars/Examples\\_for\\_Incorporating\\_Returning\\_Study\\_Abroad\\_Students\\_into\\_ISSS\\_Programming.pdf](http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/Chez_NAFSA/Find_Resources/Supporting_International_Students_And_Scholars/Network_Resources/International_Students_and_Scholars/Examples_for_Incorporating_Returning_Study_Abroad_Students_into_ISSS_Programming.pdf)



videos about reverse study abroad experiences decades. This is an eye shock.

If you felt as though  
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7. Tas Anjarw  
www.cnn.co  
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This is a good read, a bit of a shock, but might be a good article is accessible and interesting. The

#### 4. Re-entry Information for Parents, SIT Study Abroad, accessed at <http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/1968.htm>

Examining reverse culture shock from another perspective is a useful tool – certain symptoms may be highlighted in ways you did not previously understand. For the sections dealing with the differences between the person who has studied abroad and the people who have not, this new perspective is especially helpful. The handbook also offers student testimonials, similar to the *Student Guide to Study Abroad*, which may resonate with your own experiences. This is the most useful tool to refer to family and friends who want to know more about the topic, because it was written with them in mind.

#### 5. Re-Entry Resources, Middlebury College, accessed at [http://www.middlebury.edu/international/sa/returning/reentry\\_resources](http://www.middlebury.edu/international/sa/returning/reentry_resources)

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If you felt as though this presentation did not speak to your personal experience, this may be a good resource to consult. La Brack explains some of the theoretical problems with the U and W curve models, and explains when models are especially inaccurate. Though this source is only two pages, there is a bibliography that offers much more detail on the subject. The curve models were used for this presentation because of their facility in explaining the concepts of culture shock and reverse culture shock, as well as their applicability to many students studying abroad from AU. Nevertheless, a different perspective is a useful one, and La Brack offers excellent commentary.

7. Tas Anjarwalla. *Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock*. Accessed at [http://www.cnn.com/2010/TRAVEL/08/24/cultural.reentry/index.html?\\_s=PM:TRAVEL](http://www.cnn.com/2010/TRAVEL/08/24/cultural.reentry/index.html?_s=PM:TRAVEL)

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2. "On-Line Cultural Training Resource For Study Abroad," University of the Pacific, accessed at <http://www2.pacific.edu/sis/culture/>

While the entirety of this online training course is useful for understanding culture shock, the section on reverse culture shock is particularly helpful. Found in Module 2 (to which you can navigate without having to go through the first module), the reverse culture shock information offers ample explanation, as well as informative graphs. The training allows for the user to input answers to an 'expectations' activity, which can help someone gauge their personal level of reverse culture shock. Additionally, the lists of 'Top Tips' and 'Top Challenges,' while different from those listed in this presentation, offer fresh challenges and strategies to consider. Given that reverse culture shock is an individual experience, this diversity in resources will prove useful.

3. "Examples for Incorporating Returning Study Abroad Students into ISSS Programming," from NAFSA, accessed at [http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/Chez\\_NAFSA/Find\\_Resources/Supporting\\_International\\_Students\\_And\\_Scholars/Network\\_Resources/International\\_Student\\_and\\_Scholar\\_Services/ex\\_incorporating\\_returning.pdf](http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/Chez_NAFSA/Find_Resources/Supporting_International_Students_And_Scholars/Network_Resources/International_Student_and_Scholar_Services/ex_incorporating_returning.pdf)

This resource relates less to the concepts of reverse culture shock, and instead offers successful examples of integrating students who have recently returned from studying abroad into programming for international students and scholars. The two groups may have some shared experiences, and can serve to ease the difficulty of reverse culture shock and culture shock, respectively. While not all of these strategies currently take place at AU, a buddy system does exist, and other similar programs could be easily adapted to the campus.

4. Re-entry Information for Parents, SIT Study Abroad, accessed at <http://www.sit.edu/studyabroad/1968.htm>

Examining reverse culture shock from another perspective is a useful tool - certain symptoms may be highlighted in ways you did not previously understand. For the sections dealing with the differences between the person who has studied abroad and the people who have not, this new perspective is especially helpful. The handbook also offers student testimonials, similar to the *Student Guide to Study Abroad*, which may resonate with your own experiences. This is the most useful tool to refer to family and friends who want to know more about the topic, because it was written with them in mind.

5. Re-Entry Resources, Middlebury College, accessed at [http://www.middlebury.edu/international/sa/returning/reentry\\_resources](http://www.middlebury.edu/international/sa/returning/reentry_resources)

This resource is a comprehensive list of further reading, and includes some of the resources included on this list, such as the online course from the University of the Pacific. It includes websites, books, and videos about reverse culture shock, and even includes three websites that accept student writing about study abroad experiences. Another strength of this resource is that it includes sources that span different decades. This is an excellent resource for someone who has many more questions about reverse culture shock.

6. Bruce La Brack. Theory Reflections: Cultural Adaptations, Culture Shock and the "Curves of Adjustment." Accessed at [http://www.nafsa.org/\\_file/\\_/theory\\_connections\\_adjustment.pdf](http://www.nafsa.org/_file/_/theory_connections_adjustment.pdf)

If you felt as though this presentation did not speak to your personal experience, this may be a good resource to consult. La Brack explains some of the theoretical problems with the U and W curve models, and explains when models are especially inaccurate. Though this source is only two pages, there is a bibliography that offers much more detail on the subject. The curve models were used for this presentation because of their facility in explaining the concepts of culture shock and reverse culture shock, as well as their applicability to many students studying abroad from AU. Nevertheless, a different perspective is a useful one, and La Brack offers excellent commentary.

7. Tas Anjarwalla. *Dealing with Reverse Culture Shock*. Accessed at [http://www.cnn.com/2010/TRAVEL/08/24/cultural.reentry/index.html?\\_s=PM:TRAVEL](http://www.cnn.com/2010/TRAVEL/08/24/cultural.reentry/index.html?_s=PM:TRAVEL)

This is a good resource to use for friends and family that are curious about reverse culture shock, but might not be familiar with the concepts or theories surrounding it. The style of the article is accessible, and the interview with a returned Peace Corps volunteer is particularly interesting. The article offers an interesting perspective for someone new to the topic.