

TEN TRANSITION TIPS

(adapted from "What's Up With Culture?")

- 1. Know Your Destination** It is impossible to learn too much about the history and current events of the country you are going to visit.
- 2. Prepare to be Understood and to Understand** It is essential to be aware that each culture has its preferred mode of expression and traditional ways of conducting conversations. If you go abroad with absolutely no understanding of how that culture expects to give and receive information, you are going to inevitably experience increased miscommunication and misunderstandings. This directly contributes to culture shock.
- 3. Learn the Language (even when it is English)** At a minimum one should know the proper daily greetings, how to make requests, ask directions, and how to say "thank you," "please", etc. It is not only polite to do so but is universally appreciated. Assume nothing, keep your ears open, and learn as much as you can about the language before you go.
- 4. Learn Why Culture Matters** Once you begin looking for an insider's reasons for behaving a particular way or trying to understand a situation from another perspective, it opens up new ways to interact appropriately in the new culture.
- 5. Get the Logistical and Practical Arrangements Settled** Concentrate on getting basic needs worked out before tackling larger issues. Part of culture learning includes mastering an often bewildering array of how to do simple things like banking, internet access, or booking travel, not to mention more serious things like obtaining medical care or contacting authorities if necessary.
- 6. Find a Mentor** Almost any local person knows more about the country than a newcomer, but you should try and find someone who is willing to listen to you and talk over any problems you are encountering.
- 7. Stay Curious** Often a change of scene or mini-vacation from habitual activities will give you the physical and psychological rest you need to cope with whatever difficulties you are having.
- 8. Watch for Culture Shock** Monitor your own mental and physical state. Like many symptoms, sometimes just putting a name on the problem makes it easier to admit and seek help to alleviate.
- 9. Keep a journal or notebook** One of the ways to both record and recall your time abroad is to keep a daily or weekly journal. It not only allows you to have an internal dialog with yourself but also to look back upon your experiences and see the ups and downs as they happened.
- 10. Chill out** Cultivate your sense of humor; realize that sometimes a negative experience is not personal but cultural; be as non-judgmental as you can while being as open to new ideas and experiences as you dare; be flexible, adaptable, and cheerful without abandoning your core values or compromising your sense of self. When things are not going well, stop and try to figure out why.