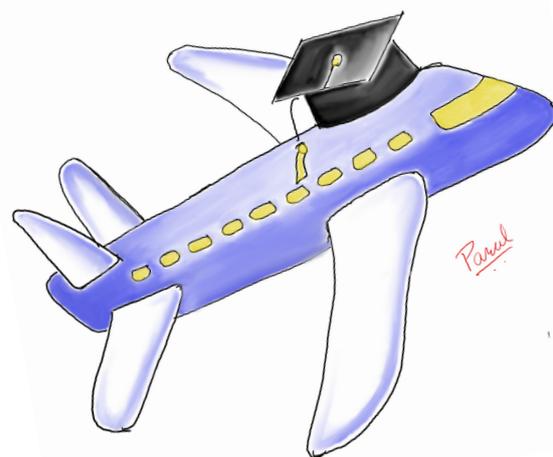


# TIPS FOR STUDYING ABROAD AND MAKING CONNECTIONS

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*Studying abroad can be one of the most exciting and enriching things a college student can do. Living in another country can open your eyes to a new way of life, improve your understanding of the world, and, surprisingly, help you understand your own culture better too. But as with any new experience, studying abroad brings its own difficulties. Studying in a different country can be overwhelming. Language barriers, cultural differences, and distance from all things familiar can lead to loneliness and homesickness. So, how can you deal with that? We interviewed students and these are some strategies they found helpful to meet these challenges during their time abroad.*

## HAVE AN OPEN MINDSET



*You're in a new place. Things will be different and that's okay. People might greet each other differently, you may not know the language, the food might be new, and you may have to navigate transportation, education, and administration systems you've never encountered. However, trying new things is all part of the experience; this may be your one opportunity to participate in some of the events around you. Welcoming new experiences will prepare you for these differences and will help make the adjusting period go a little smoother.*

*Say you walk into a marketplace in Barcelona, for example, and everyone around you is speaking the local language and moving quickly between stands to purchase food. It may feel overwhelming. However, if you view the encounter as an opportunity to learn some of the language and try new cuisine, you may find it easier to engage with people around you and discover foods you enjoy.*

## WATCH, LEARN, ASK QUESTIONS



*Being confronted with unfamiliar situations and cultural norms can be confusing and intimidating. It's easy to let our uncertainty hold us back, which can cause us to miss out on the joy of discovering something new. Instead, give yourself some time to observe your new environment and how social interactions happen. You might not know the language perfectly but you can learn a lot about customs by watching others.*

*Don't be afraid to ask questions if you don't understand. If you are uncertain about how the checkout process works at the local grocery store, for instance, pay attention to the interactions of those in front of you to gain a sense of the questions the clerk may ask or the steps you must take to complete the transaction, and try asking someone in line for advice.*

## GET INVOLVED IN THE SOCIAL SCENE AND IMMERSE YOURSELF

*Social gatherings are safe spaces where people are looking to make connections. Find common interests with others and search for commonalities between your culture and theirs. Look for friendly faces and put your best foot forward. If you find that people like a certain movie that you haven't seen or a band that you haven't heard of, check it out and bring it up next time you're around them. If people in your new culture engage in an activity that is new to you, join a group or club to learn about it. You might be surprised to see that you like it too.*

*Say you are studying abroad in Japan, for instance, and you attend a local arcade with some of your classmates. You may offer to play a multiplayer game with local people and make connections with them over your favorite games. You could also ask them what else they like to do for fun and explore those spaces as well.*

*Navigating a foreign place can be difficult, and sometimes you can feel cut off from everything that you know and love. It can be exhausting to not only connect with people without your usual forms of communication, but also absorb everything that is different in your new environment. Know that all of this is part of the experience and many people who study abroad feel this way. Your efforts to engage with your surroundings will not go unnoticed, and with time, you will be able to find people to connect with.*

## DON'T BE AFRAID TO TRY

*Trying things might push you out of your comfort zone, but most of the time locals will see that you are trying and will appreciate your efforts to embrace their culture. For instance, if you are in Montreal, you may try to order your poutine in French even though you know the cashier also understands English. You may not feel confident in your ability to complete a sentence in French, but the cashier might appreciate your effort and offer suggestions to improve for next time.*

*You might not get it right the first time, but over time things will get a little easier. Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Not only will it make your experience much more enjoyable, but it will help you make connections. Try to view your mistakes as opportunities for growth and that it's all part of the process.*



## DO SOME PRE-TRAVEL PREPARATION

*Before you leave for your travels, do some homework about the country you will be visiting. You might find something that you would like to learn more about or see when you are there. It might be helpful to learn about what is popular in music, movies, or television. These things can give you topics to start up conversations with locals. In case people are interested, learn up on facts about your home country before you go. What is interesting about where you come from? For example, it might be useful to become skilled at cooking a dish that you liked growing up. If the opportunity arises, you could cook it with new friends. You might bring a picture of one of your favorite places at home. Sharing stories about your hometown can be an easy way to bond with new friends.*

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