



# Stranger in a Strange Land - Returning Home

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**P**atricia Cassiday and Donna Stringer explore the issues and answers for Americans facing international relocation. **Part 3:**

Returning 'home' after completing an overseas assignment can be a time full of both joy and surprises. After initially reuniting with family and friends, returning to favorite restaurants and book stores (if they still exist) and settling back into everything you missed while living overseas, you may find the 'honeymoon' is over.

While living abroad you have changed in many ways, many of which you might not yet be aware of. While your overseas 'adventure' has resulted in tremendous growth and learning, it may be difficult to find others who can really relate to the scope of what you have experienced. If you climb a mountain, run a marathon, or visit Disneyland, you are likely to find someone who has shared a similar experience. It can be harder to find someone who has actually lived outside of your home culture and understands what all that entails.

It is important to remember that while you were gone, things

were happening back at home and so many of your family members, friends and work colleagues may seem different than you remember. You may find you have some challenges in communicating with family and friends that were once so easy to share with. Even your style in approaching problems and work, including your leadership style may come into question. While living abroad you have had a degree of autonomy that you may no longer experience. You may need to 'prove' yourself all over again within your organizational structure and even within some relationships.

Expecting to experience some challenges with 'reentry' puts you at an advantage. You can decide if the differences you encounter make a real difference and if they do, you will have a choice of how best to proceed. While living overseas you have been observing, asking questions, and adapting. You now have a whole new understanding of the importance of being 'culturally agile'. Applying your cultural agility at home may not be something you had given any thought to but something that can serve you well. Applying this ben-

efit of your new growth can help you transition more smoothly to home. Personally you may need to learn more about the experiences of friends and family while you were gone. Professionally you may need a plan for how best to find your voice and effect organizational change based on what you have learned.

Remember to feed your expat spirit! Connecting with other expats can be rewarding. Even if you were located in totally different countries, you may find you have the shared experience of living in a foreign land. Think of what you have learned and how that might help your organization, including those who are preparing for an overseas assignment etc. How can you continue to feed your sense of adventure? Favorite new sports? Cooking classes? Foreign films? Advanced language studies etc. Take time to reflect on and celebrate all you have accomplished! ★

**Patricia and Donna's book *52 Activities for Successful International Relocation* contains advice on reducing the "culture shock" for families and executives relocating abroad. See [nicholasbreaire.com](http://nicholasbreaire.com)**