

STARTING YOUR STUDIES IN A FOREIGN COUNTRY

It is easy to leave for a foreign country when you know what to expect. Find information on the accepting organisation, the target country and its culture and habits. Get to know its special features by reading books and, if possible, by learning the local language. Internet is also a huge source of information, use it!

CULTURE SHOCK

The term 'culture shock' describes the anxiety of a person moving to a completely new environment. This term expresses the lack of direction, the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate.

Staying in a foreign country surrounded by unfamiliar customs and culture, away from friends and your everyday environment causes some people to experience culture shock. The feeling of culture shock generally sets in after the first few weeks of coming to a new place. This is considered to involve four stages:

- 1) The student is interested in and excited by everything to do with the new culture. His new surroundings are fascinating and everything seems to be better there than in his home country.
- 2) The student is overcome by exhaustion, depression and homesickness. His language skills don't seem to be what he had previously imagined and misunderstandings occur. The student feels as if he is doing everything in a different way to the locals and begins to consider leaving for home earlier than planned. This is the 'culture shock' stage as such. It passes with time.
- 3) Realism and a sense of proportion return and the student begins once again to enjoy his time in the foreign culture. He notices that compared with his home country many things are approached in a different, though not necessarily worse, way.
- 4) If the length of stay is long then the new culture becomes a part of everyday life. The student thus adapts to the new culture. Returning to his home country may cause difficulties, as he has to go through the adapting process once again.

If the symptoms of culture shock become apparent it's important to find someone to talk to about it.