



Adaptation in Studies Abroad and Intercultural Encounters

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Study Abroad Advantages

From an ICC perspective, the value of study abroad is not only academic

Intercultural encounters offer:

- Perspective development
 - seeing issues through multiple cultural lenses.
- Develop communication styles and flexibility
 - adjusting tone, style, and expectations of self and other.
- Resilience
 - managing uncertainty, conflict, and cultural fatigue.
- Identity expansion
 - understanding oneself in new cultural contexts.
- Global citizenship
 - awareness of interconnectedness and responsibility.

Intercultural Communication and Student Exchange

- While on exchange students move from being “cultural insiders” to “temporary outsiders,”
 - New cultural systems where norms, values, and expectations differ.
- Intercultural learning happens through encounters, not just through travel.
- Develop intercultural communicative competence
 - the ability to interpret, negotiate, and adapt across cultural differences.

Intercultural Interactions

Students may form three types of networks:

- Students from same country (comfort, shared understanding)
- Other international students (shared mobility experience)
- Local networks (deepest cultural learning, often hardest to access)

Engaging with all three is better than focusing on one

Navigating Intercultural Communication

- Adaptation is not about “fitting in perfectly” but about learning to navigate unfamiliar contexts with flexibility.
- Cultural self-awareness
 - Notice your own assumptions, habits, and expectations.
- Tolerance of ambiguity
 - Accept uncertainty as part of the experience.
- Mindful communication
 - slow down, observe, ask questions, check understanding.
 - Observe local interaction patterns (directness, politeness, turn-taking).
 - Seek “cultural informants” — peers who can explain norms.
- Treat misunderstandings as learning moments, not failures.

Tips for a Richer Exchange

Define goals beyond “travel” or “language improvement.”

Examples:

- Engage in local community activities (club, volunteering, hobby group).
- Initiate conversations with people outside the international student bubble.
- Practice/be aware of different communication behaviours (e.g., more or less directness, small talk, active listening, non-verbal communication).
- Keep a reflective journal on cultural encounters and communication challenges.