Four ways to stay true to yourself when living abroad

Moving to a new country can sometimes leave you feeling torn between the person you were back home and the one you are expected to be in your new country. You may worry about losing your identity or values in an effort to fit in and be liked by those around you. This concern is a normal aspect of cultural adaptation and integration and it can be overcome. While integrating into your new culture is definitely a worthwhile goal, it is equally important for you to stay true to who you are while living in North America. Here are four tips for maintaining your identity while integrating into your new surroundings at the same time.

1. Stay in touch

Just because you are living in a new country doesn't mean you can't stay in touch with friends and family back home. Thanks to the digital age, maintaining contact with people on the other side of the world is easier than ever before. Set up regular times to make phone calls with people back home or maintain regular contact through texting or email. Be mindful of how expensive it can be to make international phone calls or send text messages. You can connect more affordably by using mobile apps for messaging and calling (e.g., WhatsApp, Skype, etc…). Staying in touch with people back home will give you a sense of continuity, while also providing you with a sense of perspective on your new life.

2. Join a group

Most large colleges in North America have established groups or clubs where people with similar backgrounds can easily meet. For example, your new college may have groups for people who come from specific countries/regions or who share the same religion. These groups are not only a great way to maintain contact with your home culture, but to also get a sense of how people who are in a similar situation as you are managing their life and feelings while living abroad. Joining a group or club also encourages you to continue to participate in activities, rituals, and celebrations that you would back home – only now, you will do so with new friends!

3. Maintain habits

Setting a daily routine will help you feel as though you have a place in your new country. Try to adopt some of the habits and routines you had in your home country into your new country. By maintaining a routine, you will feel less isolated and more yourself. A routine could include such things as waking up at the same time every day and exercising.

4. Eat like you are at home

Eating well is not only a great way to improve your overall mental and physical well-being, but it also allows you to maintain a sense of who you are. Try to find grocery stores in your new town or city that sell ingredients that are familiar to you and cook dishes that you remember from back home. While some of these ingredients may be somewhat Americanized, they can nonetheless give you a sense of your own cultural identity while you are in North America.

You should never have to sacrifice who you are when living in North America. Take advantage of the best of both worlds and forge a new bicultural identity for yourself.

International Student. “Culture Shock.” http://www.internationalstudent.com/study_usa/way-of-life/culture-shock/.