

# Re-Entry Reality:

Your Guide to Re-launching Yourself  
After Being Abroad {an excerpt}

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This document is a revised version of a handout created to accompany my re-entry workshop "The Art & Science of Re-Entry After Being Abroad" at the 2012 World Domination Summit in Portland, Oregon.

The complete *Re-Entry Reality: Your Guide to Re-Launching Yourself After Being Abroad* will be available March 2013 at [www.SmallPlanetStudio.com/rr](http://www.SmallPlanetStudio.com/rr).

Join us on March 12, 2013 for our free virtual Re-Entry Reality event! Get the details and reserve your spot at [www.SmallPlanetStudio.com/rr](http://www.SmallPlanetStudio.com/rr).

Feel free to share this excerpt with a friend!

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## LET'S BE HONEST

On one hand, you're happy to be home. Family! Friends! Pets! You can speak your native language, eat your favorite foods, and sleep in your own bed.

Nevertheless, you feel like something is off. It's not necessarily bad, just...off.

Maybe you feel like one of these travelers<sup>1</sup>:

*"In some ways I know myself better, and in some ways I feel more lost than I was before."*

*"I've been overseas for 16 years and every time I come back, it is a challenge."*

*"I thought that my re-entry was MUCH worse than my go abroad 'culture shock.'"*

**Here's the thing about re-entry: it isn't what you think it is.**

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<sup>1</sup> From a survey about re-entry that I conducted in 2012.

I'm convinced that what gets us in re-entry isn't the in-your-face re-entry shock (*I can order my favorite coffee without pantomiming! Do we really need 1,000 types of cereal to choose from?*).

Rather, it's **the on-going, much subtler re-entry fatigue** that's the real problem. (*Why do I feel out of sync? Do I really want to stay in this career? Why am I so bored?*)

Why? Because we know that being abroad has changed us, but we often can't articulate how – and how much - we've changed.

Just as the majority of culture is invisible to us, so are the nuanced ways our travels have transformed us. Once the initial excitement of coming home fades, we feel dissatisfied. Bored. Unsure.

Maybe even lost.



Most travelers and expats react to the feelings and questions that surface in re-entry, in one of two ways:

**1. Run** (*I'm bored here! Gotta get back on the road! That's where I feel alive!*)

**2. Settle** (*I had an amazing experience abroad...but (\*sigh\*) what does that have to do with my life now that I'm back home?*)

Whether we choose to go abroad again, or stay home, isn't the issue. My reaction to re-entry was to immediately plan my next trip abroad. My husband? He dove into finding a new position in his field. Even though my husband and I had different reactions to re-entry, we discovered that we held the same concern.

Being abroad made us feel alive, adventurous, and empowered. We discovered new aspects of ourselves that we really liked. However, once back home, we felt like we had to choose between being the person we'd become while abroad, or go back to being the person we were before we left.

But we didn't want to choose. You probably don't want to choose, either. The good news: we don't have to choose!

What I've learned in the course of several re-entry experiences, research, and many years helping ex-pats and travelers with international transitions, is that **re-entry isn't about *re-adjusting* to being home.**

(I mean, once you've been abroad, who wants to stay home?)

It isn't about tucking your abroad experience in a shoebox, with your photos and travel ephemera, while you get on with your life.

It isn't just those first few days and weeks after coming home.

What is, then, re-entry all about?

**Re-entry is about *re-launching* yourself into your next great thing.**

This handout will get you started down the path of re-launching yourself into a life that brings you as much joy and adventure as being abroad did.

Before we move on, I'd like to point out a couple assumptions I make about re-entry:

1. Re-entry isn't a one-time thing that only lasts for a few days, or even a few weeks. Re-entry is an on-going process that can be experienced differently, every time you go "home."
2. Not everyone experiences re-entry in the same way, to the same degree, or as a negative experience.
3. Re-entry is a valuable opportunity for learning and growth that shouldn't be ignored!

Giving yourself the time and space to re-launch after being abroad is one of the best gifts you can give yourself. No matter what you decide to do in the future, you'll do it as your true self. You'll be happier, healthier, and more satisfied, wherever you are.



## ARE YOU READY TO RE-LAUNCH?

This handout will get you started. In the “Sound Familiar?” section you’ll find the results of a re-entry survey I recently conducted. You’ll also have the opportunity to reflect on and evaluate your own re-entry experience.

The top concern identified by people who took the re-entry survey was wanting to feel as “alive” at home as they did abroad. The reflection and action exercise in the “Re-Entry Reality: Three Steps to Staying Alive” section helps you find a solution to this concern.

Finally, the “Next Steps” section tells you about my forthcoming *Re-Entry Reality: Your Guide to Re-Launching Yourself After Being Abroad* book, and how you can participate in my free virtual Re-Entry Reality event on March 12, 2013.

Thanks for reading, and please share Re-Entry Reality with a friend!

## SOUND FAMILIAR?

I recently conducted an informal survey on re-entry experiences. Below are the top answers to the three questions I asked. On the next page you'll find selected participant comments.

### Q1. What were your top three concerns after coming home?

- Feeling as "alive" at home as I did abroad
- Figuring out how to go abroad again
- Relating to my friends and family

### Q2. What are the top three things you learned by going abroad?

- Flexibility/Adaptability
- How to be more outgoing
- What I want to do with my life

### Q.3 What has your time abroad inspired you to do now?

- Spend more time abroad
- Take up a new hobby or interest
- Start a new business

Here are some general comments about re-entry. Do any sound familiar?

- Coming "home" felt like we were regressing, in a way. We wanted to be sure we wouldn't just settle back into old (boring) habits.
- Sometimes I feel like it was my peak. Now I'm trying to find ways to shape the here and now, to be as "alive" as [I was] when I was gone.
- My obstacles go right to the core of my being: what do I believe in and where do I go from here.
- I was afraid that my experience abroad would make me look [like] a person who is not serious about her career goals.
- After re-entry you look at life and become more appreciative of what you already have in life.
- Even though I know what it is like to live in America, the reality of being back was just different than anything I could have expected.

- While abroad I am in a state of constant inspiration. Once back, its tough to be as focused as I thought I would be.
- It's easy to start feeling nostalgic about travel and start planning how I could swing another long trip away, but then realize that's my way of avoiding what I really should be doing in the present.
- I think the first day I was nervous, but after that I got into a stride and life is still fun and exciting.
- I look forward to my reverse culture shocks when I come back "home." I learn something different every time.

**YOUR TURN.** How would *you* describe *your* experience(s) with re-entry?  
Take a moment to reflect and jot down some notes:

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## RE-ENTRY REALITY: THREE STEPTS TO STAYING ALIVE

One of the top concerns travelers and expats repeatedly express, when an experience abroad comes to a close, is not feeling as “alive” at home as they did abroad. The basis of this concern is a fear that our happiness is dependent on conditions that can only be experienced abroad.

Being abroad is full of novelty, challenge, and excitement. It’s also a vehicle through which we develop all sorts of new interests, talents, and skills.

Do we have to forsake fresh experiences, give up recently developed interests, ignore newfound talents or let budding skills languish just because our time abroad has ended?

Of course not! Yet we often do exactly that. We come home, feel bored, uninspired or even lost and assume that we can only be truly happy and feel truly alive while abroad.

Here's the thing. Catching the next flight to Tokyo won't solve this re-entry problem.

Simply going abroad again won't ensure that you'll feel alive again. Just as staying home doesn't mean you're destined to spend the rest of your days in a rut.

The key to unlocking this Re-entry Reality is identifying what made you feel alive while abroad, and then integrating those things into your next great thing (wherever in the world that might be). The following three-step exercise will help.



## Step 1: Identify

Think about the times while you were abroad, when you were fully present and in the moment. Times when you felt totally *alive*. Where were you? Who were you with? What were you doing? What were you *not* doing? What did you see, smell, taste, hear, or touch?

Describe three instances below:

#1 \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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#2

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#3

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## Step 2: Investigate

Reflect on the instances you described in Step 1. What were the ingredients that created that “alive” feeling while you were abroad?

Circle items, underline words, connect common themes or jot down ideas in the margins. Then list 5 ingredients for feeling “alive” below:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

### Step 3: Integrate

Now it's time to take action. How can you integrate the ingredients identified in Step 2 into your re-launched life?

List 5 concrete things you can do:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

## Wrap-Up

Congratulations on taking your first step to re-launch yourself after being abroad!

Do you now have a better sense of the ingredients that made you feel “alive” while abroad, and how you can integrate them into your next great thing?

If not, don't worry. It may take some time. The most important thing is that you're on the right path.

## Invitation

Want to share your re-entry story and strategies? I want to hear from you!

I'm looking for travelers, students, and expats to interview about their re-entry experiences for my podcast and blog.

Click [here](#) to read more and schedule a time to chat,  
(or visit <http://smallplanetstudio.com/rr> and click on “Podcast”)

## NOW WHAT?

So glad you asked.

You're invited to my *Re-Entry Reality* virtual event on March 12, 2013!

The complete *Re-Entry Reality: Your Guide to Re-Launching Yourself After Being Abroad* e-book will also be available at that time.

Visit <http://smallplanetstudio.com/rr> for the details. Space is limited so reserve your spot today!



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Hi, I'm Cate Brubaker, and I help ex-pats, students, and travelers re-launch themselves after being abroad.

I'm the founder of [Small Planet Studio](#), where I offer classes, coaching, and community for people in re-entry (which is pretty much everyone who has ever been abroad). I also teach intercultural education at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and create intercultural programs for education organizations in the US and abroad. I absolutely love my work and can't imagine doing anything else.

I've lived, worked, and traveled throughout Europe, the Caribbean, the US, and Central and South America. I grew up in Oregon and currently live in Carrboro, North Carolina.

You can contact me via email ([smallplanetstudio@gmail.com](mailto:smallplanetstudio@gmail.com)), follow me on [Twitter](#), find me on [Facebook](#) or check out my boards on [Pinterest](#). I look forward to connecting with you!

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