

WELCOME, RETURNEE!

Hi, I'm Dr. Cate Brubaker, your re-entry after living abroad guide.

Congratulations on taking the first step towards making re-entry a positive, meaningful, and transformational force in your life.



The first step is always the hardest, and you've done that. Now, you're on your way to creating more meaning, insight, and ease in your return!

Now that you've returned "home" you're in a different physical location. You can think of it like this: your new location requires a different "driver's license" in order to continue your journey. What do you do before getting a new driver's license? You read the "driver's manual" for your new location. Think of this *Quickstart Guide to Re-entry* as your driver's manual.

Ready to get started? Let's go!

*There are far, far better things ahead
than any we leave behind.*

-C.S. Lewis

THE #1 MISTAKE RETURNEES MAKE

I'm not going to sugarcoat it; re-entry is tough for the vast majority of returnees. That goes for study abroad students, returned Peace Corps volunteers, international teachers, long-term travelers, and career expats alike.

For most people re-entry is the absolute **hardest part of the entire living abroad experience**. You wouldn't think that going *home*, returning to the familiar, would be so difficult, right?

But it is.

And because re-entry is such a difficult transition, the mistake most returnees make is to **avoid acknowledging re-entry as a way to cope with it**. (I definitely did.)

It's a natural response, and it's not surprising that so many of us do this, because going home after being abroad often evokes painful feelings—and it's normal to avoid something that makes you feel bad.

If you're realizing that you've been using this coping strategy, please don't feel bad — it's not your fault and you're not doing anything wrong! But there is a better way to navigate re-entry, and I'm here to help you every step of the way.

But first, let's look at **the ways returnees avoid acknowledging the pain of re-entry**. For example, they often...

- Get really busy with school, work, family, friends, or other commitments.

- Ignore how they're feeling, don't seek out people who can help, and muddle through alone.
- Indulge in things that distract them from their difficult feelings in the short term but don't offer solutions to re-entry challenges in the long run.
- Focus on going abroad again as soon as possible so they can once again feel the euphoria that travel and landing in a new place brings.
- Get on with "real life" and compartmentalize their experiences abroad. They think, "*Well, my time living abroad is over, so why think about it now? I should focus 100% on the future.*"

And when returnees *do* talk about re-entry?

We tend to stick to the "3 Cs": *crying*, *complaining* about how nobody wants to hear our stories from abroad and how boring home is, and *contemplating* our escape.

Do any of the above re-entry coping strategies sound familiar? Are there any you'd add to the list? *Write them below:*

I'm the first to admit that I used many of these coping strategies during my re-entries.

But then I figured out a better way.

Before we dive into what that better way is, let's look at a few reasons why returnees so often just want to avoid dealing with re-entry. *Circle the ones that are true for you.*

First, returnees often see re-entry as not just the end of an experience living abroad but as the end of living an amazing global life. They often feel like they're expected to readjust to a home that they've outgrown, and that feels small and restrictive; they may feel as though they're going backwards.

Second, returnees often hear re-entry and reverse culture shock described like illnesses with numerous negative symptoms. Of course you're going to want to avoid re-entry if it sounds like a sickness you have to struggle through.

Third, re-entry often stirs up deep feelings, and sometimes conflicting ones, about home, language, nationality, belonging, family, career, and what makes us fulfilled and happy. It can also stir up feelings relating to unresolved personal or relationship issues or even old wounds. These emotions can feel overwhelming.

Fourth, re-entry can feel akin to losing a cherished relationship through a breakup or even death. The feelings evoked are similar to what people experience going through the grieving process. The life you built abroad (whether you lived that life for weeks, months, or years) is now over, and that can really, really hurt.

Fifth, returnees often fall into either/or thinking about home vs abroad—namely that the only place where they feel truly happy, adventurous,

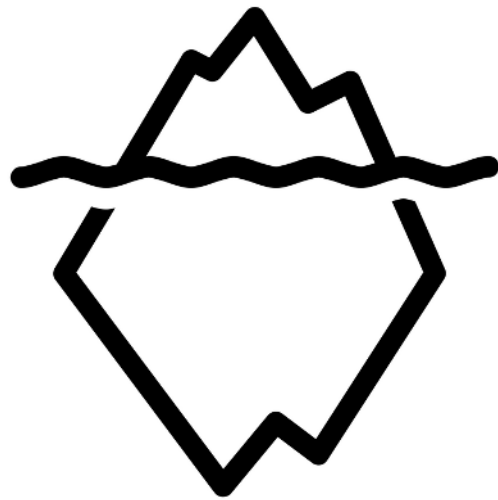
successful, visible, and special, is abroad. And on the flip side, being back at home means feeling the opposite: unhappy, bored, failing, and invisible. Especially if you didn't want to return, it's very easy to get stuck in this type of limited thinking.

Sixth, returnees' identity is often wrapped up in being the one who lives abroad, travels the world, speaks other languages, and does hard things that others find impressive. You might just not know who you are back at home, or miss who you were abroad. It's common to feel a loss of identity in re-entry.

And, finally, the vast majority of returnees lack meaningful tools, support, and guidance through the more challenging aspects of re-entry.

Why? **Picture an iceberg.**

What's interesting about an iceberg is that 90 percent of it is completely invisible, below the water line. So, if you're in a boat floating on the water, you'll only see the top 10 percent.



Re-entry is just like an iceberg; most people only see the 10 of the re-entry experience that's easily visible.

What's in the visible 10 percent of the re-entry iceberg? Things like travel logistics, unpacking, getting over jet lag, updating your resume, creating new routines, reuniting with friends and family, and some elements of reverse culture shock, such as seeing your home country and culture from a new perspective.

These are the first aspects of re-entry that returnees encounter, and they share several attributes: they're visible and easy to recognize and talk about, they apply to a large number of returnees, they're typically experienced by returnees on a similar timeline, and they're things returnees most often do receive support for. Additionally, they're not very emotionally charged.

Can you think of some "tip of the iceberg" elements from your re-entry?

Write them below:

Now, in the 90 percent of the re-entry iceberg that's invisible *below* the water line and you'll find **more challenging things like deep grief, feelings of loss, conflicting emotions, difficulty navigating relationships, loss of identity, feelings of not belonging**, and much more. These are the elements of re-entry that are internal, invisible, emotionally charged, and often very subtle.

Can you think of some "below the water line" elements from your re-entry?

Write them below:

Unfortunately, returnees are typically left to process these challenging elements of re-entry completely on their own because they often don't surface until weeks, months, or even years after a return home.

What makes it *even more* challenging is that **different elements surface for different returnees, in different intensities, and on different timelines**. So it's not surprising that so many returnees choose avoidance as a coping strategy!

But here's what happens if you do. **Picture your favorite backpack.**

Now imagine that a rock is magically added to your backpack each night while you're asleep: one rock for every day you avoid acknowledging re-entry as a way to cope with it.

At first, it's not a big deal. You don't even notice the rocks that are added to your backpack every night. And you actually get a little stronger from carrying all the extra weight around!



But then, as time goes on, more and more rocks are added and your backpack gets heavier and heavier. **At some point, your backpack is so full of re-entry rocks that it drags you down and becomes too heavy to carry.** Depending on the person, this could take days, weeks, or months (even years).

Each day that you avoid re-entry—whether consciously or unconsciously—you add a rock to your mental backpack. Even though it's not a big deal at first, it can become a very big one down the road. And at that point, you

might not have any idea where the rocks came from in the first place, which can make getting rid of them even harder.

Can you think of some *re-entry rocks* that might be in your re-entry backpack? *Write them below:*

HERE'S THE GOOD NEWS!

You don't have to wait until your mental backpack is overflowing with re-entry rocks!

If you become aware of what's in the re-entry iceberg and make a habit of deeply processing re-entry and your experiences abroad, you won't accumulate these rocks and they won't ever weigh you down.

I'm here to help you do just that. Because **while travel is the catalyst, re-entry is where your transformation is made visible.**

THE RE-ENTRY ROADMAP PROCESS

Okay, so you've read the "driver's manual" and you now have a better understanding of how re-entry works, why it's so difficult for so many, and why common coping strategies only exacerbate re-entry challenges rather than solve them.

The good news is that you can travel a different road—one that makes re-entry work FOR you by creating more meaning, insight, and ease in your re-entry experience.

Before you start out on the winding road leading from re-entry to your Forward Launch, let's take a look at the trip overview (if you want the full step-by-step directions for how to go from disappointed returnee to confident Forward Launcher be sure to get the [full workbook!](#)):

Step 1: *Identify Your Emotions*

Step 2: *Reframe Re-entry*

Step 3: *Unpack Your Re-entry Backpack*

Step 4: *Find Your Global Life Ingredients*

Step 5: *Create Your Forward Launch*

ARE YOU READY?

... to make your relationship with re-entry a positive one that helps you create more meaning, insight, and ease during one of life's most difficult transitions?

...to invest in yourself by making re-entry the most powerful part of your entire living abroad experience?

...to learn how to make re-entry work FOR you, instead of unknowingly letting it work against you?

If you said YES, you're ready for the RE-ENTRY ROADMAP workbook!

[Click here to see inside the RE-ENTRY ROADMAP workbook!](#)

This self-guided workbook will help you navigate your complex emotions, figure out who you are and what you want your life to be like *now*, and then find your best next step - your Forward Launch!



[Click here to check out the RE-ENTRY ROADMAP workbook!](#)