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## British International School Riyadh

### The art of studying overseas

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Going overseas to study is like starting a new relationship. First, everything about it seems amazing. Then you discover the faults. Then you find these faults charming. Then you adopt the faults and irritate old friends by being constantly late or preferring to take your tea black.

That is one reason why it's so difficult to keep a real relationship going when you travel to another country to study. By the time you get back, your expectations, attitudes and priorities will all have changed. You will also have met lots of new people with cute accents.

All this will only be true, however, if you pluck up the courage to go out. Studying abroad can be a lonely experience, especially in the first few weeks. You do therefore need to make the effort and attend foreign student get-togethers, or to get in touch with that friend of a friend with whom you have nothing in common but temporary geography.

It also helps if you prepare before you go. Track down [students](#) in your institution who have been to the country you are going to, and listen to their advice. Get a few of their friends' phone numbers - and don't be shy about using them.

One thing to ask about is packing. Will you need something special for the climate? Or something formal? Remember that you are unlikely to start wearing sequined boleros just because you're in a different country. Also, other countries do actually have shops.

Then, you need to know what the food. And it can be useful to find out about alcohol policies before suggesting a breaking-the-ice pub-crawl.

Try to plan what you want to achieve while you are away - in terms of both studying and sightseeing. Don't work so hard that you never leave your study bedroom, and do try to build in time to travel. You don't want your experience of the country confined to the university campus and Irish theme bars.

On the other hand, don't worry if you don't get to see everything in the tourist brochures, although if you're studying in Paris you should know by the time you get home that it's where the Eiffel Tower is.

No plan made before you leave should be too rigid. The key is to go with an open mind and seize opportunities as they arise. Spending hours every morning in a different museum won't necessarily deepen your understanding of the culture.

Instead, museums are ideal places to dump visitors. While seeing a familiar face may seem appealing in those first homesick weeks, ultimately visits can be disrupting and stop you settling in. You don't want your friends to use your trip as an excuse for a holiday - or to think that you are on one.

Do let them know how you are getting on, however.

Be easy on yourself. Learning a language and getting to grips with different ways of doing things is hard work, so don't worry if getting top grades is a struggle. But don't be feeble either. You can still change a light bulb even if your flatmate is more fluent in the local language.

Finally, once you get home, think of ways to keep up links with wherever you were studying - by joining a relevant student society, say. Like any relationship, if you are going to keep it going at a distance, you will need to work at it.