

Bindle
Keeping Your Mental Health and Travel Tools Close, Wherever You Go

by

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Honours Bachelor of Arts, Wilfrid Laurier University, June 2017

a MRP

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Masters

in the program of

Digital Media

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2018

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of my Master's Major Research Project is to create an educational resource to prepare post-secondary students who struggle with their mental health to be able to participate in international opportunities with ease. In five chapters, this guide will aid students to minimize the stress and anxiety that may accompany the negative thoughts of leaving their comfort zone and being in an unfamiliar place with new people, while not being prepared with the resources to cope with their mental health. The goal I intend to achieve is to create awareness regarding the amount of resources available to students struggling with their mental health, so travel may be more accessible. The reasons students are not taking part in these opportunities are not limited to financial constraints or lack of knowledge, but due to students not being prepared with resources that connect travel to poor mental health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my supervisor, Dr. M. Lee:

Thank you for your countless hours of support and encouragement. I am grateful for your guidance, and for pushing me to think beyond what I read. Thank you for helping me grow my MRP to surpass my expectations. I feel very grateful to have had you as a mentor during this entire process.

To my professors and the MDM administration:

Thank you for encouraging my love of learning. In one year, you have equipped me with the tools and resources to be successful.

To the MDM 5.0 cohort:

I feel very lucky to have had the opportunity to share this year together. Thank you for shedding light on a new perspective of learning, and sharing in your creativity to inspire such beautiful projects. For your collaboration, dedication, and constant support of one another, I am so proud of all our hard work. You will all shine so bright, and I am excited to see where the future of digital media takes you.

To my classmates, Dawsyn, Nada, Emi, Jem, Mar, and Ryan:

Your friendship and support throughout the entirety of this program has led me to this moment. I am thankful to be able to count on incredible people like each of you.

To Laurier International:

Thank you for igniting my love, appreciation, and need for travel.

Lastly, to my dad, my Tate:

From my first day of junior kindergarten at Presteign Heights, to my last day of grade twelve at De La Salle, to moving me in and out of my apartment as an undergraduate at Wilfrid Laurier University, and supporting me throughout my Master's degree at Ryerson University- thank you. Everyday when you would drop me off at school, you would say, "Have too much, too much fun...and work hard!" Thank you for teaching me the importance of education and for sharing in my love of learning. Thank you for pushing me, even when I pushed back. I am grateful to stand witness to your hard work each day. You are an incredible example of what perseverance, dedication, and success look like. You have set the bar high, Tate.

DEDICATION

My MRP is dedicated to Michael Peros, Vallerie Traitses, and Harry Dearden.

Each of you have been a constant light in my day to day. You all continuously teach and encourage me to speak up and speak out about what is important. You have been incredible role models to me, especially throughout my MDM journey, and I am in constant awe of how lucky I am to be surrounded by such hardworking, talented, loving, and wonderful individuals. Thank you for cheering me on and encouraging me to be the best version of myself. Your kindness and unwavering support go a long way.

Michael- my brother, friend, and #1 supporter: thank you for teaching me to work hard. I am so proud of your hustle and your ability to keep moving forward. I watch in admiration as you follow your dreams and ultimately do what makes you happy. I am beyond thankful that I get to look up to someone as special as you everyday. I love you, and I am incredibly lucky to be your sister.

Vallerie- my cousin, sister, and best friend: thank you for supporting me and making me laugh every single day. Thank you for always having time for a donche break and giving me a reason to smile. You light up every room you walk into, and I am always in awe of your positive spirit and outlook on life. You have encouraged me to keep laughing and not take myself too seriously. Pinky.

Harry- my boss and friend, thank you for always picking up your phone and checking in. Thank you for putting challenging moments into perspective and encouraging me to be vocal. You introduced me to this Master's program and supported me throughout it all. And, you created SmallTalk. So, thank you. I hope I've given them something to talk about.

With love,

Larry

TRIGGER WARNING

The following content includes research and discussion of poor mental health and mental illnesses, including, but not limited to depression, stress, and anxiety disorders.

The purpose of this in-depth discussion is to provide a safe space for students struggling with their mental health to learn and cope with these triggers. This will serve as a tool to prepare these students for when they are outside of their comfort zone. My goal is to encourage more post-secondary students to seek travel opportunities and not let the state of their mental health limit their abilities.

This content may be shocking or upsetting for some readers.

PROTOTYPE

To access the prototype, please follow the link below. This prototype is best suited on an iPhone.

<https://projects.invisionapp.com/share/T9NLMQUZ68S#/screens>

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of my Master's Major Research Project (MRP) is to create a reliable and educational resource to safely prepare post-secondary students who struggle with their mental health to participate in international opportunities comfortably. This MRP will aid students in minimizing the stress and anxiety that may accompany the negative thoughts of leaving one's comfort zone, being in an unfamiliar place with new people, and not being prepared with the resources to cope with their mental health.

The goal I intend to achieve with my MRP is to decrease the amount of post secondary students shying away and turning down international opportunities. Through my research, I have learned that the reasons students are not taking part in these opportunities are not solely limited to financial constraints or lack of knowledge of the program, but because of poor mental health circumstances. Students are not prepared to travel abroad because of the lack of resources available that connect travel to poor mental health.

This resource serves as a tool to not only provide necessary resources, guidance, and support, but will aid in decreasing the stigma attached to poor mental health. My MRP is not only well researched, but it is coming from a place of lived experience. By speaking from experience, students will have a stronger sense of belonging and understand that these emotions connected to travel, rooted in their mental health are not abnormal.

World Health Organization (WHO) constructs a now universal understanding of mental health as, "a state of well-being in which the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (Galderisi, 231.) Additionally, the International Journal of Social Psychiatry builds out mental health in three

parts: “awareness of one’s own self,” “ability to relate well with others,” and “all of one’s actions are useful, or at least not detrimental to one’s own self and other” (Thirunavurakasu, 99.) With this information, herein, mental health in this MRP will be defined as unmotivated and unintentional symptoms of stress, anxiety, and depression that make coping with everyday tasks once deemed as simple, to now be difficult. These symptoms do not have to be diagnosed by a healthcare practitioner to be recognized and endured by a post-secondary student.

Connecting mental health and travel makes my project unique, as there are no other guides or resources in the market targeting post-secondary students in this area, in efforts to make travel more accessible for those who are struggling with their overall mental health.

A critical question my MRP asks is, “why do post-secondary students need to go on exchange?” Not only through researching blogs and academic journals, but from personal experience, I can attest to and confirm to the extraordinary value that is taken away from participating in an international exchange. The cliché and somewhat deterring phrase that is associated with studying abroad, is that students only go to “find themselves.” As well, students only take part in exchange to solely travel and ignore their studies as much as their institutions would allow before receiving a failing grade. Taking part in an international exchange introduces a need that cannot be met from staying at their home post-secondary institution during the completion of their education. When one experiences a different culture “through educational and cultural exchange, you gain a deeper understanding of yourself and those around you” (Petrick, pg. 710) This experience initiates a type of wisdom and understanding that cannot be learned from a textbook, professor, or a new career. An international exchange enables a student

to “leave the familiar behind and plunge into the unknown, showing a commitment to understanding other people and cultures” (pg. 711.)

The appeal to travel abroad during your time as a post-secondary student is that it increases your self-development and awareness. The vital ages of maturity and development for young adults are between 18-24, and is the most significant time to learn from a different perspective. The World Education Program (WEP) Australia explains “that maturity and social poise [are] fueled by the necessity to confront challenges outside a familiar support network and comfort zone” (WEP, 2018.) Being independent from your own and familial traditions of religion, culture, food, and language can add value to your own perspective of not only yourself, but towards people of different cultures, your relationships, education, and world issues. Being in an international environment enables one to see how the world lives differently. A student can call a new city home and create a new comfort zone, far from their initial expectations.

Next, not only do international exchange programs aid in one’s own personal growth and maturity in the moment and near future, but they will understand how it will benefit their academics and career. International experience is understood to improve career opportunities and add more value to graduate school admissions. It will aid in your drive to strive towards higher achievements and goals. As difficult it may be to prepare to pack up your life and move abroad, another concern is how difficult it will be to make exchange feel comfortable, if all your friends are at home. A student will share these incomparable international experiences with new friends from all over the world. Even if one is travelling alone, as an introvert or an extrovert, everyone involved in the student exchange program is in the same position as each other; they are all there to experience the world and meet new people. One student blogger explains that “making friends

while studying abroad in a foreign city doesn't always come easy, but if you put yourself out there, you're bound to build lasting connections" (wep 2018,) while another student suggest that others should "choose their program that they'd inevitably meet other like-minded student" (WEP 2018.) Just as one would make friends and build relationships with their classmates at home, it is similar on exchange, but more exciting because you are all facing a new adventure together. Travelling at a young age "challenges you and shapes you in ways you just can't expect, and you come back with many unique stories, and you'll find that you are very glad you decided to leave" (Jury, 2017.)

Travel is a meaningful and significant step in improving one's overall mental health. My initial research through personal travel blogs introduced me to Marta Estevez. Marta is maybe like you and I. She is a young American student, a travel blogger, and struggles with her mental health. She loves travelling, and recently traveled to Southeast Asia for the first time, specifically Thailand- She narrates a stressful situation, where her previous travel experience allowed her to act differently and cope with a situation, that without this past experience, she would have reacted to very differently:

"The roads were partially closed off that night and the streets were filled with hundreds upon hundreds of people that made it incredibly difficult for us to move," she explains. "I had to learn to accept the situation and adapt our travels accordingly, without breaking down. I'm not sure I would've had the same composure a few years ago in this situation" (Nazish, 2018.)

Marta interprets this experience with an important life lesson: "The more challenges you're faced with, the better you'll get at overcoming them, eventually becoming more resilient,

mentally and emotionally. Now, I can get over similar stressful situations very quickly, without having the issue get me down for long” (Nazish, 2018.) Marta is an exemplary example of why travel is important for your mental health. Each experience is not just an experience in the moment, but a life lesson. Travel prepares you to face other real life situations, (maybe with more distinction) with confidence and a positive mindset.

When we combine the benefits of both mental health and travel, we can understand that “travel and the travel experience has a positive impact on the emotional and physical wellness of individuals” (Petrick, 2013.) Travel is correlated to our mental health, according to PsychCentral’s article on [How Travel Can Benefit our Mental Health](#), “travel reduces stress and improves feelings of one’s quality of life and happiness” (2013.) There is an abundance of online resources that defend why travel is important in strengthening one’s mental health. From everything to enhancing your creativity, restoring relationships, stress relief and boosting self-confidence, many studies suggest that travel is one of the leading factors that will improve your mental health. Travel gives us a new adventure and a new type of freedom, that we are unable to accomplish in our own backyard. A new environment allows us to prepare a new way of thinking and develop a new perspective. With a new environment, we are able to focus on bettering our mental health, in whatever state it is in.

First, it has a “positive effect on your personality” (Petrick, 2013.) Psychcentral explains that the differences that you experience from new environments during travel “strengthen the openness dimension of your personality,” “can put you out of your comfort zone” and can make you “less emotional reactive to day to day changes, overall improving your emotional stability.” (Petrick, 2013.) The positive effect travel has on your personality is beneficial to your overall

mental health. The sense of vulnerability that travel exposes you to enhances your self awareness and self confidence. Travel enforces a moderation in your personality to prepare you for new situations that you would not usually face in the comfort of your own home. Travel prepares you with tools for when you return home. These are important skills to obtain from a young age so that you can reinforce these lessons in your everyday life once you return home.

Next, it is an outlet for stress relief. This journal explains that travel is a “great way to escape the stresses and commitments of everyday life, offering novelty and change in the form of new people, sights, and experiences” (Petrick, 2013.) The word ‘new’ is often used when describing long term travel. This is because we are taking part in new experiences in new environments, which encourages us to utilize a part of our brain that we don’t normally exercise in our day to day routine. This benefits our mental health as long term travel allows us to take a break from the stresses of our everyday and create a new normal. It is not as much of an avoidance, but understanding that there is more to life than the events in our lives that cause our anxiety and stress. We are able to put our negative mental health factors in perspective and see them from a different angle.

Moreover, “happiness is boosted even before you travel.” Going against the common phrase, ‘money can’t buy you happiness,’ travel in fact, has the ability to do so. In an unexpected way, we yearn for experiences, not only possessions, and travel provides that for us. Travel administers a need to see more than what we experience everyday. It is a luxury that we work to afford because we appreciate memories longer than physical possessions. According to a Cornell University study, the anticipation of a trip can increase your happiness substantially, even more than the anticipation of acquiring something tangible, like a new car (Nazish, 2018.)

“The new events and experiences help rewire your brain, hence boosting your mood and self-confidence.” (Nazish, 2018) Now, what better way to foster your mental health than by doing things that are proven to be positive attributes? Taking part in activities and adventures to nurture your emotions and feelings goes beyond sitting at home and yearning for answers.

This MRP is comprised of a five-chapter guide that is intended to emotionally prepare post-secondary students who want to take part in an international exchange, but struggle with their mental health, making the decision to leave the familiar behind discomfoting. Chapter One: The Importance of Research and Where to Begin, focuses on the importance of research and the steps to take to prepare before you get accepted to your international school. Chapter Two: How to Prepare (mentally and physically) to Move Out, details the experience of moving out and how to prepare not only your personal belongings, but your emotions. Chapter Three: Managing Financially while Abroad, recommends steps a student traveller should take before moving abroad to ensure their finances are in order, and they will have no financial challenges while away. Chapter Four: Getting Comfortable in a New Environment, explains culture shock and how to cope with the symptoms upon arrival in their host country. Finally, chapter five: Last Minute Details and Packing, outlines a plan of action to help students better organize and prioritize the final steps before they leave for their exchange. Each chapter summarizes its purpose of how it connects one’s state of mental health with a new travel experience and studying internationally. Each chapter builds off the other, preparing the student traveller to the moment before they leave. Through my research and experience, I have learned to understand the necessity of each step, and that leaving home to move abroad is not a process that can be rushed or lack in preparation, especially with poor mental health.

CHAPTER ONE: THE IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH AND HOW TO GET STARTED

Summary

Travel research will leave you more reassured to know that you are not the only one who needs this guidance. Specifically looking at travel and mental health, this research assures you that travel can be safe, comfortable and fun, even with your internal struggles. Moreover, travel research is not limited to researching your destination and different experiences, but how to cope with your mental health challenges while you are away from your familiar environment. From blogs, vlogs, and smaller scale websites, these platforms provide more personal experiences that you would not typically find in larger scale journals and articles. You can take every measure and conduct all the necessary research expected before departing on your international exchange, and still have worries about leaving home- and that's okay. Rest assured, you are not alone when it comes to your concerns- and this is evident through the multitude of student run blogs and university guides that cater to student matters before they sign up to go abroad.

The Importance of Travel Research

Internationally recognized student travel blogs, *Study International* and *Student Universe*, both conclude that most significant concerns for students hesitating to studying abroad are homesickness, their personal finances, feeling ‘FOMO’ (fear of missing out) back home, and their mental and physical health. To reduce or limit your concerns, it is important to do your research. By doing so, you can minimize pain points and understand how to cope with a stressful situation. Research for any one of your concerns, listed above or not, ensures new or experienced student travellers that you can overcome these, and there are resources. Moreover, once you have outlined your concerns, it is important to take the first step: research. This will guide you to better understand if you are in a good position to travel, what questions you need to ask your home university and what questions you will need to ask your host university.

Most tourists and travelers depend on well known sites like *Travelocity* and *Tripadvisor* to do their research for them and stick to those guides. However, it is important to look beyond more than one site or a travel agent and research on your own. For a student struggling with their mental health, a significant amount of travel research will not only make them more aware of their surroundings, but will reduce any preconceived travel worries and stresses because you will be prepared. More research is needed for a student with poor mental health not only so they can travel “off the beaten path” (Krupar, 2006,) but to be fully aware of what you are expect to see. This benefits your mental health, as you will be more assured and comfortable with your new surroundings. This trip will not only be from a well researched background, but from your perspective and what is comfortable for you. This extent of research is not necessarily as

important for a student without these mental health concerns, as their anxiety or stress may not be as triggered in new situations or heightened in unfamiliar environments.

According to the Journal of Travel Research, it is stated that “more than 93 million Americans used the Internet when planning their trips in 2010,” and “the Internet provides travelers with information on tourism products and services, facilitates tourism transactions, and offers new ways to learn about tourism products and services directly from other consumers” (Benyai, 2011.) Travel research is important for any length of trip. Researching beforehand prepares you to personalize your experience and understand the new environment that you will be immersing yourself in. For students struggling with their mental health, Goeldner further supports the importance of completing travel research in precedent to your trip by explaining the two main purposes it serves. This includes “a forum for the exchange of ideas of travel research” and to “improve the quality and comparability of travel information through such avenues as standardizing definitions, research methods, and techniques by recommending the minimum basic facts to be gathered in travel industry surveys” (2011.) These diverse finding may not be as accessible for students once they arrive in their new host country, so it is imperative for students with poor mental health to seek these answers out beforehand and come more prepared than a student who is not struggling.

Furthermore, Goeldner’s understanding of travel research supports the fact that it does not have to be boring. Many are hesitant to “research” just because of the word in itself. But, travel research includes blogs, vlogs, and relatable news articles. Research can be negatively perceived and can seem like too much work, however, it can be as interesting and exciting as you make it. Resources are not limited. Goeldner continues to emphasize that “the number of tourism

and tourism-related journals have virtually exploded...with 150 tourism-related journals published in English” (2011.)

Where to Start your Research

Just like any school assignment, starting the initial research tends to be the most difficult part. With an astounding number of resources available, it can be overwhelming to dive in and begin. Without any prior knowledge or experience in the topic, it can either be extremely eye-opening and exciting, or draining and uninspiring. The latter should not be the case for planning and preparing for travel; and that is why the tourism community has had to become more interactive and inviting. Goeldner insists that “early tourism research was criticized for being too descriptive and lacking rigour” (2011,) and this is where blogs, VR (virtual reality) tourism, and more personalized articles come into play.

Available travel information can be broken down into several categories, according to Understanding the Sources of Online Travel Information. “Specialization, endorsement, and other user star rating to reflect the technological functions and psychological effects” (Choi, 2017.) This process organizes the relevance and importance of one’s research and can help identify if it is validated by like-minded travelers, and if it will be useful to you. This is how online travel research distinguishes itself from any ordinary, research; it breaks it down for you to gain something from it, and how other people in the same situation view it as well.

The most recommended platform to begin your travel research is through online diaries or blogs. According to Banyai’s article, Evaluating Research Methods on Travel Blog, they explain and discuss that travel blogs are a rich source of data which deliver valuable information

regarding one's new travel. They analyze and hold "content and narrative analysis" (2011,) which are crucial when preparing your research. Students need to understand that "blogs are a new technological phenomenon" and that they offer "the opportunity to reveal tourists' interpretations of tourism products and experiences, and to express tourists' impressions, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings, all that may otherwise not be revealed in a more constrained research environment such as personal interviews" (2011.) This perspective offers a more intimate and accurate outlook on travel, that will be more useful to a new traveler than jumping into unspecific but official travel literature.

Blogs acts as a virtual community. It is an online, interactive platform that allows for someone to offer their opinion, while others support or deny the importance or relevance of the post. These types of travel communities are a good form of communication for students to better equip themselves with the more personal and detailed travel information they would need, that they typically would not find on a corporate travel company. This back and forth communicates the pros and cons of traveling to a certain destination, while understanding and catering to the demographic that is reading. As aforementioned, there are travel blogs written by and for students travellers who having taken part in an international exchange during their post-secondary degree. This relatable information aids students of all abilities and is accessible to all students. As it is catered directly to them, the content can go in any direction, and can aid them in specific ways that larger travel companies cannot.

Managing Your Mental Health While Abroad

The International Association for Medical Assistance to Travellers (IAMAT,) is a beneficial organization that aids students struggling with their mental health, as it includes all aspects of travel, including all accessibilities that could impair an individual from pursuing international opportunities.

“Your mental health is just as important as your physical health- especially when you’re travelling” according to IAMAT. IAMAT highlights four important factors to understand in regard to your mental health while you are away, why you should prioritize your mental wellness, and how you can reduce travel stress to make the most of your time abroad and enjoy your experience. These are not meant to turn students away from travel or give them more reason to be fearful of travelling, rather, they are being implemented and discussed so students feel comfortable that there are resources available, and they are not the only ones with these questions.

First, IAMAT states a well-known fact- travel can be stressful. Even though the purpose of travelling is typically to minimize your stress and maximize your relaxation, sometimes that is not the case if you are diagnosed or undiagnosed and struggling with poor mental health. IAMAT suggests that you “talk to your friends, family, or a healthcare professional about your travel plans,” as well as “check in with yourself and know your limits” (2018.) These are important factors to consider, because it may be your first time travelling abroad for a long period of time or travelling abroad for the first time while struggling with your mental health.

Next, “travel health insurance typically excludes coverage for mental health conditions” (IAMAT, 2018.) This is an important area to flag and check in with before you depart. There are

different costs for each level, and it is important you understand the implications of different levels of insurance, and what is best suited for your needs as a student traveler. Go over a variety of health insurance plans with your family or your international student centre to see what is recommended, based on your individual needs.

Moreover, they point out that “your prescription may be regulated at your new destination” (IAMAT, 2018.) This could determine what countries you can and cannot visit or live in, which can help in your decision process. This research is crucial to your overall health, as some airports will not let you pass the border if you are carrying a specific type of medication- so it is vital you do research on exactly what you need beforehand. A couple of precautions you can take to ensure you are safely allowed to continue with your prescription medication are to “bring a letter from your healthcare practitioner that describes your health condition, the details of your prescription medication, and its dosage,” as well as “contacting a doctor or mental healthcare provider at your new destination to ensure that your medication is available and that it can be prescribed to you in case you need a refill” (IAMAT, 2018.)

Finally, “always have a plan” (IAMAT, 2018.) It is that simple: be prepared to the best of your ability. It is always challenging dealing with a medical emergency, but it can be more stressful in a foreign country. This demonstrates why it is vital to be aware of risks that can trigger your conditions while you are abroad. Talk to your doctor or mental healthcare practitioner before you travel and set out a plan of how you can cope with situations you are unfamiliar with.

Choosing Your Exchange Destination

Prior to submitting your choice of schools to your universities' international centre or even starting your initial research, it is important to ask yourself some important questions that will not only add value to your research, but will ensure your exchange experience is the best it can be. Wherever you go, you will enjoy your exchange experience, but it is important to be prepared beforehand so you know what you are getting yourself into.

Through the combination of personal experience and student run blogs, the most important topics a student with poor mental health needs to consider and research before settling on your host university and new country include:

1. What are my goals for this experience?
2. Where would be a good place for me to go?
3. What courses will I/ need to take while away?

To start, narrow down your goals for your experience through personal and academic benefits. By doing so, you are able to understand the value behind your experience abroad and prioritize what you want to accomplish. This includes making international friends, travelling to a certain number of countries, taking an international course, or learning the countries official language. As some of these aspects may be more challenging than others, depending on your accessibilities, it is imperative to carefully consider each topic, and not rush through this process to get to the more exciting parts.

Next, after you have understood what you want to gain from your experience, you can start looking at where you want to go. By doing your own research, inquiring with friends, classmates, or family who have traveled before, you should breakdown the countries and region

you would prefer to live and study in, the size of campus, the length of your stay, the overall cost, and the language of instruction. All these components go hand in hand with each other, and can help you narrow down the best option for you. Whether you are looking to learn a different language, travel afterwards, or the most effective region to live in, these factors will all aid in your overall decision- and it's an important one.

Finally, it is important to focus on the academic side of your exchange. The courses you take are important as they go towards your studies at your home university, which affects the overall completion of your degree. It is vital to research and be mindful of unique courses, courses offered in English and other languages, and any courses restrictions you may have.

CHAPTER TWO: MOVING OUT

Summary

The purpose of this chapter is to educate students who are trying to balance their mental health challenges while preparing for the ups and down of moving out of the country and beginning a new international chapter. Moving out and living on your own can be scary—especially in a completely new environment that you may have not have had the chance to visit before. What if pictures don't do it justice, and you don't know how to picture yourself in your new surroundings? From lived experience, academic journals, and student-run blogs, this chapter will prepare you for what is to come.

Prioritizing your mental health when you move out

While your mental health should always be important in your day to day activities, it is vital to prioritize it in new situations. The New York Times stated that “moving is an intensely emotional experience,” (Warner, 2016) at any point in your life, not just when you are young and in school. This statement validates that you are not alone to feel emotional or be in distress when you are beginning to prepare your move abroad and thinking about the future in a new city and new country. For some, “moving houses is so stressful that numerous research studies have focused on the psychology of relocation” (Warner, 2016.)

There are common situations that enable and trigger one’s anxiety while preparing to move out, which include but are not limited to:

- Finding an apartment/house that is clean, safe, and in a good area
- Location relative to school, city centre, amenities, shopping
- Communicating with your landlord if their first language is unfamiliar to you
- Finding roommates or choosing to live on your own
- What necessities you will need to make your new home feel like home

As moving to a new home or to a new city is stressful when an individual is a good mental health state, “it gets more complicated if you have mental health problems to contend with” (Reynolds, 2016.) Moving can not only trigger regular or old emotions, but also can unravel states of anxiety, stress, and depression. Preparing to move to a new country can also generate feelings of isolation, which can increase one’s poor mental health condition. Knowing that there will be cultural differences and a new and unfamiliar language can attribute to these

feelings. Gabe Howard, an award-winning writer and speaker, who lives with bipolar and anxiety disorders explains his perception of moving. He explains that “any interruption in my routine can spell trouble” (Howard, 2018,) and we keep reading that “moving is difficult for even the most well adjusted, so I don’t need to convince you of the potential pitfalls for those of us living with mental illness” (Howard, 2018.)

The process of moving is more stressful than just knowing what to packing to prepare ourselves for a new life in a new city. Moving is “incredibly stressful and people don’t realize it- they mainly talk about the packing and the external part of moving” (Kershaw, 2010.) While what we pack and prepare to bring abroad is still important, we need to also recognize and hold to a high degree the emotional baggage that will come with moving, and prepare our emotions and mental health.

The popular blog, The Financial Diet, outlines and explains five emotional stages of moving away from your comfort zone and into an unfamiliar city. Doolin helps readers understand that, “moving to a new city is stressful on many levels, but beyond the stress of logistics, the start of something new bring with it conflicting feelings of eagerness and anxiety (2016.) “Excitement, terror, doubt, apprehensive enthusiasm, and acceptance” (Dooblin, 2016) are stages in the emotional cycle that accompany your preparation to move abroad:

1. Excitement:

The best part, and where most stories begin. You wanted to move for a reason, and your excitement is part of the process of embarking on a new adventure and that is what you initially signed up for. You are excited to start your new adventure with a “whole new city to explore;

new streets to fall in love with, and new routines to fall into. Newsness is exciting!” (Dooblin, 2016.) Hold onto this feeling, because it is sometimes left behind and forgotten about when you are overwhelmed with the stresses that accompany the moving process.

2. Terror:

Doolin highlights that “starting a new chapter means finishing another” (2016,) which is incredibly relatable and accurate. This next part in the emotional moving process reminds us that one part of our lives has come to an end and it is time to embark on a new adventure and we have to embrace the new change. We begin to question our new adventure and wonder “why did I feel the need to make a new city my own?” and “the things that I was originally excited about now terrify me” (2016.) This part unravels our hidden fears of having to accept change and move forward. We feel ourselves wanted to pump the breaks and resort back into our comfort zone.

3. Doubt:

Doubt and terror are similar, but it allows us to generate new and old emotions of what moving will be like. Doubt brings out the feelings of assumption and what we think our future after our move will be like. “Moving is a hassle, staying where you are comfortable is easy, and easy starts looking a lot more appealing when you are self doubting” (Dooblin, 2016.)

4. Apprehensive Enthusiasm:

Dooblin prepares us with the statement that “if something doesn’t scare you, it’s not worth doing!” (2016.) She wants future travellers the advice she gives herself, which is to “develop

that guiding voice in my head that motivated my enthusiasm and reminded me that the move was worth it [in the first place] (Dooblin, 2016.) By doing so, we can minimize our fears and made up assumptions of what the worst could be, and remember why we are here in the first place. We are encouraged to find our ‘aha’ moment and recall the purpose of why we are moving away.

5. Acceptance:

This is the last part in the emotional moving cycle and it occurs once “the excitement is back, even if it was accompanied by a bit of fear” (Dooblin, 2016.) This reminds us that it’s okay to get discouraged at first and be nervous. Afterall, we are human, and trying new things are scary. However, it is important to find the resources and support to overcome these new situations and feelings so we are able to carry on and experience them. Dooblin concludes with, “I basked in the face of these new upcoming challenges and accepted them as opportunities for greatness, instead of obstacles” (2016.) Howard reminds us that at the end of the day, “it is important to keep your eye on the prize. Sure, moving is a hassle, but whatever reason you chose to move should be your mantra.” (2018)

Learning to Prepare to Move Away from Home

There is no easy way or one universal method to prepare to pack up your life and begin a new adventure in a new country. Calling somewhere else home is exciting, but also scary, so it is vital to be prepared to a face a new environment, new people, and a new culture code. Even for the most mentally healthy individuals, there are still obstacles and challenges to overcome. Those struggling with their mental health must “set a routine to feel comfortable with their new

surroundings” (Howard, 2017,) as this will “keep our anxiety under control” and “manage our expectations” (Howard, 2017.)

We must learn to be prepared for the best and worst, without overwhelming ourselves with the negative. While adjusting to any new situation can be challenging, we are constantly reminded that to decrease situations that will trigger our stress and anxiety, we must be prepared. It can be dangerous to be unprepared while we are anticipating our international move. This means little things, like “remembering to bring enough medication” (Reynolds, 2016,) even though it seems like a simple and silly reminder, as we take it everyday, is very important. Reynolds reminds us that “being stranded without access to meds can be a powerfully isolating situation” (2016.)

Sometimes, we want to rush to see the end goal and ignore the steps involved to make sure the process of moving away from home goes smoothly. We are all guilty of rushing the process to get through the tough times, like dealing with our emotions and mental health to get to the fun part: being abroad! However, Howard helps us recognize and reminds us that “Rome wasn’t built in a day, and moving is a giant pain in the you know what. It is important to understand that moving is going to take time and everything will not always go as planned” (Howard, 2018.) Moving is a long process and it can be completely unpredictable.

In [Pysch Central](#), Borchard explains the necessity of managing your anxiety when you are moving for the first time. This is an important list to understand as you prepare to leave for your international opportunity when you struggle with your mental health because new environments and change can drastically affect your overall well being. By having a better understanding of how your mind reacts to changes in your environment, you will be able to

better understand your trigger points and how to prepare yourself in new situations, when you cannot rely on the comfort of your surroundings.

1. Exercise

The most important strategy for coping with your mental health is to exercise. Lucky for us, we can take part in this while we are in any part of the world, and are not limited to this activity only at home. Bouchard explains that, “You need to find the right exercise for where you are in your life and in your head to give you the relief” (2015.) Some of reasons why exercise is a good remedy when you are struggling with your anxiety or depression because:

- “Cardiovascular workouts stimulate brain chemicals that foster growth of nerve cells
- Exercise increases the activity of serotonin and norepinephrine
- A raised heart rate releases endorphins and a hormone known as ANP, which reduces pain, induces euphoria, and helps control the brain’s response to stress and anxiety” (Bouchard, 2015.)

Going forward, these are some good coping mechanisms to understand when you are undergoing a stressful transition period, like moving abroad. Having the knowledge on hand prepares you for exasperating situations where you feel helpless.

2. Breathe

“Your body releases 70 percent of its toxins through breathing” (2015) Bouchard states. We breathe on our own for survival, but we are not always breathing effectively in order to manage our stress and anxiety.

- You must breathe through your diaphragm
- Toxins build up, which cause your anxiety and stress
- By releasing carbon dioxide that has been passed through your bloodstream and into your lungs, you help your body and your metabolism
- Breathing deeply gives your immediate relief (Bouchard, 2015)

As easy as breathing sounds, sometimes it is challenging to calm yourself down to be able to partake in this and understand how beneficial is. By understanding the overall health benefits of deep breathing before, we can remember this during our increased stress and anxiety periods, and utilize these tools.

3. Understand the language of the amygdala

Amygdala is defined as “paring a trigger with a negative event” (Bouchard, 2015.) The language of amygdala is responsible for “sending us panicked notes, which aren’t helpful to persons like myself already prone to anxiety” (Bouchard, 2015.) This means, we need to learn to understand how to silence this noise in our minds so we are able to better communicate with our internal panic, so we can prepare ourselves to stay calm in stressful and anxiety inducing situations. This means that when we hear or see a specific trigger, we automatically react in a negative way. It is

a negative trigger to our body and mind, but by learning how to silence it and overcome these negative triggers, we can stay calm and lower our anxiety in these situations.

4. Take the local lane

Bouchard explains two paths we can take when we feel anxious, and our emotions result in panic. First, “our brains can take the express lanes, which means that the thalamus part of our brain- a symmetrical structure of our brain perched on top of the brain stem which is responsible for relaying sensory and motor signals to the cerebral cortex — delivers a message straight to the amygdala, which tells us to panic” (Bouchard, 2015.) Or, “the brain can take the local lane, the high road, in which the thalamus sends its information to the sensory cortex, where additional processing and refining of the information take place, before it goes to the amygdala” (2015.) This may be a complex concept to grasp, but by using our toolkit to keep us level-headed and calm, we are able to take the ‘local lane’ and not feel the anxiety driven emotions that cause us to panic and overthink the situation at hand.

5. Go from ‘no’ to ‘know’

The final tip to manage stress is rethinking the negative thoughts that run through our mind during hard times. For example, thoughts like, ‘no, I can’t. No.’ root us in feelings of anxiety when we self-doubt and do not believe we can accomplish something because it is unfamiliar or new. To turn the ‘no’ into ‘know,’ we must educate ourselves with the new situation beforehand, and not face situations with no background knowledge, or we will feel unstable and our minds will race to panic. By preparing ourselves with all the necessary information, we can face new situations at ease, and not worry about events we cannot control.

How to Move to Another Country when you have a Mental Illness by Reynolds introduces like-minded readers to Micaela, a Canadian citizen who moved to Japan. When she first moved abroad over ten years ago, she found it challenging and heartbreaking to adjust to the countries lack of knowledge and incredibly significant stigma of mental illnesses. She writes, “people who have never experienced mental illness assume it’s a myth or an excuse” (Reynolds, 2016.) She continues to explain that suicides rates in Japan are extremely high in comparison to Canada, but “Japan fails to recognise lots of mental health problems as a legitimate issue. It’s stigmatised. If you’re depressed, you’re lazy. You’re just not trying hard enough” (2016.)

As Micaela continued to balance her work and new life in Japan, she still had major setbacks adjusting to her new life in a new country. She even spoke to her boss at the television and radio station she was working at, where she confided in him about her struggle with her depression, and he responded, “we’re all tired, but you don’t see us complaining,” and “go home and nap it off” (Reynolds, 2016.)

Research is the key to your preparation. Finding resources that you can take advantage of while you are away are crucial to how you will be able to balance your mental health and preparation of travelling. And, fortunately for us today in 2018, there are a multitude of resources that have made mental health more accessible and persevering through challenging times. Especially when there are language and cultural barriers regarding mental health and mental illnesses, there are services “digital therapy services like TalkSpace and Babylon” which are “English-speaking therapists via a website or downloadable app, giving people access to digital therapy and addressing several of the key barriers many face when trying to access treatment” (Reynold, 2016.) These services eliminate the location dilemma of not having local treatment.

CHAPTER THREE: FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT WHILE ABROAD

Summary

This chapter intends to educate students on how to manage and understand their finances more effectively while travelling abroad for a long period of time. For a student who is struggling with their mental health, their levels of stress and anxiety are more likely to rise when having to understand a new concept of budgeting, currency, and spending in a new country. This chapter covers more than the basic understanding on how to manage their finances and creating a budget will be a positive attribution to their overall mental health before they leave for their exchange. Understanding one's own finances is not only beneficial for peace of mind, but for their safety.

Understanding your finances before you travel for your mental health

Money Empire asks, “What came first, the mental health issues affected by financial problems, or the financial problems affected by mental health issues?” (2016.) Understanding our finances and how to budget our money when we are in a new country are important to not only our safety and comfort, but to our mental health. It is usually an aspect that gets lost in the excitement, of course because it is the least fun! We want to focus on the fun parts: where we are going to go and what we are going to see. It is challenging to focus on the least entertaining parts, but in the end, paying attention to this will save us from the strain on our mental health later on.

Emmett validates this by stating that students are, “most concerned with the cultural aspects of the trip. But one of the most important things is learning how to budget” (1998.) As we grow older and take on more responsibilities, financial management usually creeps to the top of our list of what initiates the most stress. This is why by having a concrete understanding of our finances and creating a travel budget before we leave home is important.

With poor mental health, it is important to prepare and understand your finances so you can avoid stress and anxiety inducing situations. For a student not struggling with their mental health, regular preparation is fine, because the notion of panic will not set in as easily if something goes wrong. The Government of Canada has prepared a list of important steps to take before travelling abroad, and for someone struggling with their mental health, this is the basic foundation of what you should begin with.

1. Talk to your financial institution

It is important to keep your financial institution in the know of your whereabouts, and how travel will affect your money and access to money. Depending on your bank, you may need to contact them or change a setting on your app if you are travelling to a new country, so you are able to access money. If you struggle with anxiety and severe stress, you do not want to have the heightened worry that you will be without cash or access to your credit or debit card when you are in a new and unfamiliar city.

2. Credit cards, debit cards, ATMs

- Know your financial institution's restrictions on daily withdrawal limits from ATMs for its debit cards. Be aware that some ATMs may have daily withdrawal limits that may or may not match those imposed by your financial institution. Check your debit card for the names of ATM networks affiliated with your financial institution and research the locations of ATMs that are part of these networks in your destination country.
- Notify your financial institution that you will be going overseas and ask whether your debit card's Personal Information Number (PIN) will work overseas. If your PIN contains zeroes, ask whether this will be a problem in non-network ATMs. If your PIN has five digits, ask if you can change it to a four-digit number because many foreign ATMs won't recognize a five-digit PIN.

3. Protect Yourself

It is important to be financially protected before you leave for your travels. This requires:

- Knowing the expiry dates on all your cards so you are not stranded with no working cards

- Ensure you have a sufficient amount of money in your accounts to cover your expenses and a little bit extra for emergencies
- Have a copy of your bank account numbers and credit card numbers in case they are stolen
- In the event that your cards are stolen, have all the international numbers on hand to call to report your stolen cards to cancel

Preparing Personal Finances before you Leave

Learning to manage your finances can be difficult in any setting and at any age. So as a student going on exchange, you are not alone figuring this out if this process is new to you. Managing your money and understanding new currencies can be difficult if you are constantly on the go. Gap Year provides students with several important themes that are important to understanding your financial management while abroad. Cash and currency exchange, emergency funds, budgeting on the road, and type of bank accounts are a few crucial topics they cover, aimed at students travelling internationally for the first time.

1. Having the local currency on hand:

This is important is important for your safety and peace of mind while you travel. If you know you will be visiting a country that uses a different currency than what you are typically used to, it is better to be prepared than to get there and take the chance of not having anything on you. Mooney explains that, “Wherever you’re going in the world, you’ll need some local currency for the few days and for ongoing minor expenses” (2018.) You can do this by “ordering early from

your bank if the currency you need is obscure” (2018.) For example, if you are studying in central Europe, most of the currency will be the Euro, and that is a common and accessible currency to obtain. However, if you decide to travel during your exchange to more eastern European countries like Czech Republic or Hungary, which do not use the Euro, it will be of your best to prepare beforehand, and order from your host country’s bank before you leave, instead of waiting until you arrive in the new country. This will minimize the anxiety and stress of not having any cash on hand, or only having to depend on your credit or visa cards.

2. Having an emergency fund:

“It is a good idea to take a credit card overseas for emergency situations,” Mooney explains, “if you need to leave somewhere in a hurry or require urgent medical treatment, they’re invaluable” (2018.) Even if you carry a credit card that will solely be used for emergencies and not for leisure, it will leave you at ease to know that there is emergency money in case something does go wrong and you need money immediately. Prepare for the worst, in the event that you cannot borrow from a friend or get a family member to transfer you money in time. You do not want to be stranded in a new country with minimum funds. This is not to say you need to have an obscene amount of money in it, but a little bit of cash to get you by, just in case.

3. Budget while on the road:

Mooney continues to explain that, “it is important to be aware of what you’re spending and what you’ve got left” (2018.) This may seem redundant, or information that you are already aware of, but it will keep accountable and on top of how much you are spending, especially when you have

no incoming cash flow. Mooney suggests that a student should keep a record of what they spend. Whether it be in a physical notebook or in the notes section of your phone, this method will be a beneficial tool to see your spending habits, what you spend the most on, the least on, and if you are keeping up with your pre-recorded budget. Whether it be when you withdraw money from your host countries ATM, spend money on transit, or from a trip to the grocery store. You should always know exactly where you are with your finances, so there are no surprises and you don't run into financial trouble, meaning you do not have enough money to cover a hostel or a train, and you don't realize until it is too late. By knowing where you are with your finances, you will be able to avoid any stress and anxiety that accompany poor financial management. However, Mooney reminds us to set aside "a set amount each week, to make sure you keep some extra money aside for treats. You don't want to miss out on a once in a lifetime opportunity because you've spent all your budget for that week." (2018.)

4. Have two accounts:

With two accounts, you can dedicate one to your "day to day transactions" (Mooney, 2018) which includes your spending money and daily needs. Additionally, having a savings account is important too. "You'll be able to watch your travel stash grow. Savings accounts offer higher rates of interest than current accounts, which means any money sitting in there will be earning you more money" (2018.) It is helpful to have two, as one acts as a backup, almost like an emergency fund. You can prioritize one for your daily use, and the other for larger spending. Weekend trips, hostels, and transportation would be an appropriate use for your savings account.

CHAPTER 4: ADAPTING TO A NEW ENVIRONMENT

Summary

This chapter intends to aid students who have poor mental health, to enable them to better prepare and understand what culture shock is, and how to cope with the symptoms when they first arrive in their new country. It is understood that culture shock has the ability to negatively alter any student's travels, but this chapter specifically focuses on the negative consequences and effects that it brings for students with poor mental health. By curating a chapter that breaks down and explains adaptation for symptoms such as anxiety, stress, and depression, students will be able to eliminate the initial shock and have a more concrete understanding of what to expect arriving in a new country with a vastly different culture. There is a need for this because culture shock can decrease motivation and inspiration while increasing fear, panic, and homesickness. These side effects of culture shock are deafening for students struggling with their mental health, because it increases their negative thoughts and their levels of stress and anxiety. It is an unneeded element that can be easily avoided, if they are correctly prepared beforehand.

Understanding how culture shock influences your mental health

According to Kocak's journal, Management of Culture Shock, the phenomenon of culture shock affects your "physical, psychological and behavioural reactions" (pg. 63,) because a traveler, expat, or nomad is unaware of the "cultural clues and the signs and symbols which guide social interactions, are stripped away," so, "the expatriate is not fully able to understand any type of feedback from the novel environment due to the lack of knowledge of a novel culture" (pg. 64.) Adapting to a new environment is a significant cross-cultural adjustment, that should not be overlooked or ignored. The severity of a student's mental health can articulate how much preparation is needed beforehand to understand a new culture, so the adjustment is not too significant. The following symptoms of cultural shock are what is expected for the average traveler, but as a student already struggling with these accessibilities, the strain and burden will be much heavier to bear. These include, but not limited to "homesickness, increased irritability, the feeling of helplessness, exaggerated concern over drinking water, food, and bedding, or excessive criticism of local customs or ways of doing things" (pg. 64.)

Importance of preparing for a new environment for your mental health

You've gotten into your dream school in a country thousands of miles away from home. You've done all your research on your new country, have your new flat ready to move into, and already started learning the basics of the new language. Now what? You've seen your country through Instagram posts and YouTube videos, but how will you know how you will feel in the situation, if new experiences discourage you and weaken your confidence? Below, we have outlined steps to take that are common for students struggling with their mental health, and how

to more easily adapt to a new environment without feeling too overwhelmed when one first arrives. This is catered to those struggling with their mental health, which differs from a student who is not, because it allows them to decrease the element of surprise and not being prepared with the skills to stay calm and better adapt to a new situation like this. By knowing what to expect, a student can feel more prepared to face a new environment with confidence and not feel vulnerable in unfamiliarity.

The Cycle of Adaptation, as outlined by international student blogger, Pancheva in *Top Universities*, explains typical sensations, emotions, and experiences that are common when first arriving in a new country, and how to overcome them. This is specifically targeted at bettering a student's mental health, and ensuring it will remain positive while becoming acquainted in a new culture. Any new situation can be overwhelming and nerve-wracking, so for students struggling, it is recommended to be informed and learn to prepare beforehand, than being left to master it while you are away from what you are familiar too.

7 Stages of Adaptation when you first Study Abroad

1. Culture Shock

As explained earlier in this chapter, culture shock is an initial fear of being exposed to a new culture, and not knowing how to adapt, because it is different from what you are used to back home. Schmitt explains that the “process of recognizing, understanding, and adapting to new changes” is what causes culture shock (2015.) Whether it be language, food, music; these distinctive cultural traits are vastly different from the norm in your home culture, and it takes some time to adjust and understand a new way of life. Pancheva interprets the feelings of culture

shock of being normal, but to be prepared to not get as much sleep as you are used to, and want to speak to your family and friends back home more often than usual (2014.)

2. Overwhelming Enthusiasm

This is the second phase in the cycle, because as soon as a student feels they have somewhat adjusted to a few elements of a new culture, they remember why they wanted to study abroad in the first place. Pancheva exclaims that, “you immediately forget about all the culture shock-induced panic you feel absolutely overwhelmed with joy and curiosity. Everything is amazing, everything is new and interesting; even the smallest things start to impress you and you can’t believe that you were crying your eyes out just a few days ago” (2014.) However, with all this enthusiasm, students struggling with their mental health must be cautious of the come-down from this, and know that not all days will feel this great. Those struggling with depression must be willing to accept to take the good as it is, and the bad as it is. Some coping strategies for this are when you are experiencing highs, it is encouraged write it down and take pictures. So, when you are having a low day, you remember it will get better. By grasping on to the extremes in emotions and comprehending what good and bad days can bring, you will be able to cope with the change and face each day with confidence.

3. Non-Stop Student Parties

The beginning of the semester while on exchange is like any “Frosh Week” back home, where you are constantly meeting new people, experiencing the best of the new city, and having fun without any commitments to school work just yet. The notion of going out all the time is a

common misconception of going on exchange. Going on an international exchange does not require you to solely drink and dance in order to meet like-minded students. There are plenty of events that cater to introverts and extroverts to make you feel comfortable, welcome, and adapt to the culture. When you struggle with your mental health,

4. Motivation and Inspiration

Motivation and inspiration are next in the cycle because it feels like a “make it or break it” type of situation. When the newness of the city begins to feel comfortable, and everyone starts becoming more adjusted with school, it can be a challenging time to start feeling ‘yourself’ in a new environment. It’s no longer just solely partying and meeting new people, the challenge of school sets in. It’s time to get back into routine and get back to reality, of school, homework, your social life, and fitting in some travelling too, of course. What parts of your routine are missing? Your therapy? Visiting family and friends? Watching your favourite shows at a certain time? Little events like this that are significant and impactful to your routine can affect your motivation and inspiration to carry on. Instead of reminiscing and feeling sad about what is missing from your new environment, it is important to incorporate familiar situations into what your new normal is. Especially when you are struggling with your mental health, this will help you feeling calm and consistent. When your mental health is not steady, new adjustments to your environment can throw you off and make you feel lost.

5. Fear and Panic

This stage in the cycle is similar to the previous one of motivation and inspiration because it is revealing new emotions of being away from home and adjusting to a new environment. It can be more challenging for a student struggling with their mental health because having an inconsistent balance in their emotions is a strain on your overall wellbeing. It enables feelings of worry, fear, and regret. When feeling this way, students who are not struggling with their mental health are able to cope more easily. While struggling with anxiety, it is a challenge to keep replaying the same scenarios in your head and panic over things that are out of your control.

6. Homesickness

Homesickness can be a regular feeling, whether you are away at school a few hours or a few thousand kilometers away from home. However, at this point in the cycle, “it’s not that hard, because you now have some friends nearby and you have settled in a bit” (Pancheva, 2014.) You are more well adjusted and have begun to master your coping techniques for when you are feeling stress and anxious. At this point, your homesickness is more nostalgia and a bit of FOMO (fear of missing out) of what is happening back home, such as “your mother’s cooking to the friendly neighbour’s dog you used to walk” (Pancheva, 2014.)

7. Adaptation

The final stage of the cycle is actually adapting and feeling comfortable with your new environment. It takes a while, so do not worry that it is taking you longer than others to adjust. By this time, “you have made friends, you attend university and complete your studies, you start

getting familiar with the place- the local shops, clubs, and parks- and slowly but surely, you start feeling at home. Because it's true what they say, home is where the heart is, and your heart will feel cosier in this new environment day by day" (Pancheva, 2014.)

A student's mental health can affect their process of adapting to a new environment while abroad. As you prepare to go abroad and are worried about how you will adjust, your mental health is a priority. GoOverseas' article, [How to Deal with Culture Shock while Studying Abroad](#), compiles shared experiences from well-rounded student travelers that come from all walks of life. From studying abroad for their first time, to living on their own for the first time, to learning a new language. Schmitt sets aside an outline of five steps to help conquer culture shock and homesickness while first living abroad. This short guide will help students struggling to find happiness in the little things and remind them why they went on exchange in the first place. This is easier said than done, but this guide is a process to add to your tools of coping techniques for when you need it the most.

- “1. Learn as much about your host country as possible
2. Ask study abroad coordinators for advice
3. Set learning goals for your study abroad trip
4. Write down what you love when you first arrive, and look back later (when you need to!)
5. Find a healthy distraction” (Schmitt, 2014)

CHAPTER FIVE: LAST MINUTE DETAILS AND PACKING

Summary

This final chapter is designed to provide a plan of action to efficiently organize and prioritize the final steps before a student leaves for their international exchange. For a student who is struggling with their mental health, the final steps they take in preparation before they leave home can determine their initial attitude and emotion upon arrival to their new home. This specific plan of action is catered to a student with poor mental health, than a student who is not struggling with their mental health, because it outlines and explains coping strategies and handling stressful and anxiety inducing situations. These are not common situations that a student who is in a good mental health will have to worry about while travelling. Stressful events can happen to any student in a new situation, especially while travelling, but are more likely to occur and cause more disturbances for a student with poor mental health.

Why packing is an important part of travelling

This section of packing preparation is catered to students struggling with their mental health, as it lists both specific and general items, that will be more difficult to find abroad. It may seem silly to prepare to this extent so far ahead of one's travel plans, but for students with poor mental health, this will ease leaving their comfort zone. Students with high functioning stress, anxiety, or depression will have a more difficult time coping with change and adapting to a new environment, so having the added worry about not having specific items is an unnecessary stress that is easily avoidable with correct preparation. This is not as relevant for students who do not identify as struggling with their mental health because the "element of surprise" and "being in the moment" is less intimidating. Having to think on the spot and being unprepared is not as appealing for a student with poor mental health, so being over prepared is a recommended notion.

Packing List Catered to Students Struggling with Mental Health

- Prescription medication
 - It is recommended that one should bring the full amount of their prescribed medication that will last for the entirety of their stay, as it will be difficult, if not impossible to have their prescription transferred to their international location
 - According to Oakland Abroad Office, if a student is staying longer than three months, they will need a doctor to re-prescribe their medication, if they have not brought enough to last.

- Keep prescription medication in your carry on with your name on it, University of Toronto International Exchange Centre advises, “so you are not suspected of bringing medication illegally” (2018.)
- Speak to your doctor beforehand
- Non-prescription medication
 - The University of Toronto’s International Exchange Centre warns students to “not take for granted that all countries will have medicine for headaches, allergies, motion sickness or the flu. Bring your own basic medical kit” (2018.)
 - When you are sick, or getting the symptoms that you are about to be, it is better to have medication on hand instead of adding the worry of having to go out and finding it in an unfamiliar country, where the first language may not be English, making the process more challenging.
- Passport
 - Ensure that is up to date and not going to expire within six months
 - A few months before, learn if your host country requires a Visa and be sure to have that in your passport and any other required documents
- “Emergency contact numbers” (as per University of Toronto International Student Centre)
 - These should be written down and kept in a safe place in case you cannot access your phone or get immediate access to internet.
- Journals (or whatever platform you use to record your emotions and experiences)

- Journaling is an important technique and method to record and track your mental wellbeing. This activity keeps you accountable for your emotions and how you have reacted to certain situations, trigger points, and ways you can minimize negative influences to your mental health.
- This is targeted to students with poor mental health and not to student who do not identify with poor mental health as it is a method that will allow you to reflect and lift one up when they are experiencing lows during their exchange
- This differs from recording your trips and experiences for your memories, because you will note how certain events made you feel
- Photographs of family or friends back home
 - By hanging pictures of familiar faces and loved ones in your new environment will make you feel less lonely and comfort you in low times
 - This is important because being on exchange is a rollercoaster of emotions. Students will experience highs, and an abundance of fun and adventure, but there are also times that trigger homesickness, and being reminded that there are people back home who miss you and care about you is essential.
- Physical things from your room/house back home
 - This goes hand in hand with the last point of bringing photographs. Bringing small objects or nicknacks from home give your new home a sense of familiarity and remind you that where you are is only temporary, and that your home is waiting for you once you return
- Letters from your friends or family

- Having your friends or family write you letters to keep in your bag or on your nightstand is a personal reminder during stressful and anxious times that everything is going to be okay. Having a handwritten and personalized reminder is a coping mechanism that will keep you calm and level-headed while you are far away from the familiar. This is recommended for students with poor mental health because while getting caught up in the moment during stressful times, it is challenging to bring yourself down to reality. Especially when you are in a stressful situation or an event has triggered your depressive emotions, having personalized notes from people who care about you is important.
- “Different methods to access money,” (as per University of Toronto International Student Centre)
 - Whether it be through a credit card or debit card, it is important to have a few options in case one card is not accepted in a country you are visiting
- Local currency and foreign currency
 - By having a few hundred dollars in cash for your new home destination, you will decrease the burden of the few places who do not accept credit or debit card
 - If you arrive late at night and banks are not open, you will feel more at ease having some change on hand and not having an empty pocket.

CONCLUSION & CONGRATULATIONS

If you're reading this, it means you have successfully completed five chapters of Bindle and are ready to add these resources to your travel toolkit!

Addressing your mental health challenges is a big step- and a step in the right direction. By recognizing that travel isn't easy, but it is something you want to take part in is courageous. The world is fascinating. I'm 22 years old and have travelled to 22 countries, as cliché as it sounds, it is life changing. When I travel, my experiences have been both exciting and eye opening. The world is beautiful, and I can't wait to continue exploring. Unfortunately, the world can also be overwhelming, and it saddens me to learn that other students turn down travel opportunities because of their struggles with stress, anxiety and depression. These challenges accompany the idea of having to leave their comfort zone and immerse themselves in a new country, culture, or language.

For this reason, I created Bindle. I wanted to ensure that students are fully prepared before long term travelling, we are making travel inclusive to everyone and not allowing mental health to be a deterring factor. Your mental deserves first class seating. Everyone deserves the opportunity to see the world, and I want students from every ability to travel without hesitation and enjoy everything it has to offer. I can't wait for you to start exploring.

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