



How to Heal Homesickness



Expats who are missing home when they're living overseas are not alone. Just ask Susan Matt. When she moved to Utah from the Midwest, she unexpectedly felt homesick.

"My husband and I had been very much looking forward to moving west, but once I got here I realized how unfamiliar it was," says Matt, a history professor at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, and author of *Homesickness: An American History*.

"I had always grown up on stories about how restless Americans are, how individualistic they are and how easy it is for them to be mobile," Matt says. "I felt I must be a very strange person if I was finding it so painful to move on. ... As it turns out, [homesickness] has been a widespread problem throughout American history."

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— Betsy Burlingame, founder and president of ExpatExchange.com

In fact, homesickness used to be considered a serious illness. During the Civil War, 5,200 Union soldiers were hospitalized for homesickness - then called "nostalgia."

Cures for Homesickness

The following suggestions can help expats satisfy cravings for their home countries even as they plant roots in foreign countries:

- **Avoid comparisons.** When he moved to Nepal in 2011, Rob Robideau learned to accept that there

is no place like home. "Every time you say, 'This is not like ...' you trigger homesickness," says Robideau, author of *At Home Anywhere: Six Proven Expat Secrets for Making Yourself at Home in Any Foreign Country*. "The sooner you stop comparing to home, the less homesick you're going to be."

- **Unpack.** Putting away luggage in your home abroad often means putting away homesickness. "Once you move in, unpack every single box and really move into your home," says Betsy Burlingame, founder and president of ExpatExchange.com. "Not doing so seems to have the psychological effect of keeping one foot in the door and one foot out."
- **Bring familiar comforts.** When embarking on international travel, bringing one's favorite books, movies and photos from home can help - in moderation. "Take what you need - think of them as ... comfort foods - and leave the rest," Burlingame says.
- **Eat and remember.** Favorite foods are what homesick travelers long for most, according to Matt, who says the first Italian restaurants in the U.S. weren't established for Americans, but rather Italian immigrants who missed Italian food. In that tradition, travelers should look for restaurants that are run by expats and serve their native cuisine. They can also have their favorite snack mailed to their home abroad. Robideau suggests making foreign transactions on something simple, small and easy to ship. Expats can use a trusted online foreign exchange service when sending money online to pay for shipments of food and other familiar comforts by initiating transactions with their laptops, tablets and smartphones.
- **Make friends.** Perhaps the best cure for homesickness is other people. "Go to expat gatherings, join clubs and do whatever else it takes to build a real-world social network," Burlingame says.
- **Read the news.** Travelers missing home can maintain a mental connection to a physical place by reading their home newspaper online. "It makes you feel like you haven't completely renounced that part of yourself," Matt says.

Ultimately, travelers can adapt, but they should give it time. "There is no one way to adapt to another country and its culture," Burlingame says. "If what you are doing isn't working, try something else."



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