

# 5 Depressing Side Effects No One Tells You About Moving Abroad



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During the past 10 years, I've lived in five different countries.

It's been an amazing journey that has taught me more about life, love and fear than any education or self-help book ever could.

To build a new existence far away from everything you know and believe in is the most powerful feeling in the world.

People who have moved abroad will nod their heads in agreement.

They will tell you that traveling has broadened their horizons, made them more open-minded and has shown them what truly matters in life.

What they won't tell you is it's also the loneliest, most alienating and most guilt-ridden thing they have ever done.

In expat land, fairytales don't exist. Here are five things that are bound to happen if you decide to leave your home behind:

## 1. Your loved ones will be devastated.

No matter how you try to sugarcoat it, moving abroad is essentially a selfish choice.

It's great that you're living your dream and are choosing the life (you think) you want, but really, you're not making anyone happy but yourself.

If you're blessed with amazing family and friends, they will do anything to hide their true feelings from you.

They don't want to burden you with their doubts, fears and "what on earth are you doing?!" thoughts. They will tell you, "If you're happy, we're happy, too!"

My parents did an impressive job. By the time I left for Los Angeles, I was convinced my upcoming adventure was as exciting to them as it was to me.

I was so busy with me, me and me, that I was completely and utterly oblivious to their pain. That day at the airport, I saw a sadness in my parents' eyes that I had never seen before.

When, after our final goodbyes, I turned around one more time, they looked fragile, lost and 10 years older. My adventure was their misery.

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## 2. You'll feel guilty all the time.

Two months after I moved to Los Angeles, a good friend of mine received a devastating cancer diagnosis.

I tried to be there for her on the phone and via email, but I knew all she really needed was a big hug and my shoulder to cry on.

When my 80-year-old grandma fell down the stairs and called me from the hospital, sad and lonely, she said, "When are you coming to visit, sweetheart?"

I wasn't there for the lows, and I wasn't there for the highs. Over the past few years, I've missed most of my friends' bachelorette parties, birthdays, baby showers and weddings.

These were events I always thought I could do without, until I was introduced to the short, but oh-so-painful silence that followed almost all of my "I'm sorry, but I won't be able to make it" announcements.

When you move to the other side of the globe, time and financial constraints will inevitably determine the social choices you make.

Attending a friend's wedding may prevent you from being there for your dad's 60th birthday or your sister's graduation. How do you choose? How do you justify the choices you make?

Even though I know it's my life and I get to decide how I live it, my moving abroad has made me feel like a horrible (grand) daughter and friend many a time.

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### 3. You'll feel really, really lonely.

I've always been fortunate to be surrounded with many wonderful people. When moving to yet another country, I never had a problem meeting people to hang out and explore my new town with.

However, even though I was never really alone, I experienced a deep sense of loneliness I'd never known before.

I'll never forget my first American Christmas, spent with a roommate I'd met three weeks beforehand and her family.

I was overwhelmed by their kindness, but I knew I was mainly invited out of pity.

Watching them and the love they shared made me feel like an intruder, like someone who didn't belong.

It takes time to build meaningful relationships, so when moving abroad, you will inevitably spend a lot of time with people who are fun and exciting, but with whom you don't share any memories or stories yet.

It's like being back in college all over again, but this time, you're on your own in a country far, far away from your loved ones.

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### 4. You won't fit in anymore.

Moving abroad has changed me in so many more ways than I ever imagined it would. I've discovered loves, passions and fears I never knew I had, and have abandoned old convictions and beliefs that just didn't feel right anymore.

It's a good change I've embraced fully, but it has also — very slowly and very subtly — alienated me from the people and place I used to call home.

When moving abroad, such an important and large chunk of your life and development is happening elsewhere, that fully identifying with what used to be becomes nearly impossible.

Instead, you find a new home in your new country that partially fills the void. However, since you lack roots and history in your new home, you will never, despite your best efforts, fit in 100 percent.

It's why almost all globetrotters I've met throughout the years struggle with existential questions like, where do I belong? Where is home? Where do I want to grow old?

Unable to answer those questions, they often move again — and again, and again, and again. They are searching for that feeling of home they were once so eager to leave behind.

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### 5. You'll lose dear friends.

Friends you never thought you'd lose because you met in kindergarten, bonded during college or traveled Europe together, will soon grow apart.

For all the reasons mentioned above, moving abroad will change and sacrifice dear friendships. Of course, some will stick, but overall, most won't.

It's no one's fault and it's everyone's fault.

You forget about their birthdays because you're too busy hanging out with your new friends.

They blame you for attending your dad's 60th birthday instead of their bachelorette parties.

You could try harder to squeeze more visits in. But, they could return the favor, and, for once, come your way as well.

Choosing different paths ends friendships, just like it ends most relationships. It's inevitable, and it's life, but that doesn't make it easy. By losing friends, you lose a part of yourself and your history.

So has it been worth it? Do I regret taking the leap and choosing an international lifestyle? Yes and no, absolutely.

With great sacrifice comes great reward, so stay tuned for my upcoming pieces, and feel free to ask me any questions about moving abroad that you may have.