



ISER Early Career Researcher Blog

Tips on moving abroad for your PhD

By Tim Dorweiler, PhD Candidate
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Hey everyone, my name is Tim, and I am a PhD candidate at Michigan State University. This post is about how to navigate moving to the US for graduate school. My advice is not necessarily THE best way to do this. There is no single way of navigating such a big endeavor – it is a very personal experience that everyone must figure out on their own. But I think that I can provide some advice that may be helpful for those considering moving abroad for school.

I was born and raised in Germany and have done this big puddle jump from Europe to the US twice now, once as an undergraduate for 12 months and again in 2019 to get my PhD. Most people that you know will tell you all the great and glorious things that they encountered when they moved to a different country for school. No one will start off with the challenges and rather sad times that they have been through. And trust me, they all have had bad days. Moving to a different country, and especially continent can be intimidating and challenging. In my case, it was the best but also hardest decision of my life.

Moving abroad is exciting ... new school, new friends, new adventures, and a brand-new culture. But sometimes we cannot appreciate it as such. It also means leaving your family behind, your friends, your culture. It's a balancing act, a rollercoaster-ride or whatever you want to call it. I could talk about this topic for a long time, but I have narrowed it down to three main takeaways.

1. *Embrace the sad days just as much as the good days.* You will have the best days and your worst. Especially when you leave behind very close family bonds, friends and maybe even your partner. Look at the greater picture and what this experience teaches you. Try to embrace every lesson that you will learn, the good and the bad. In the end you WILL come out as a stronger and better person.
2. *Get out of your comfort zone.* People that stay in their comfort zone missed out on a LOT of great experiences. Yes, you might not be proficient in English and an introvert, but you will find your people. The more you leave your cozy comfort zone – the more you will learn, and in the end, that's why we do this. To learn and experience. Make the most out of it!
3. *Don't fight the culture, learn from it.* Cultural differences are difficult. You won't understand many opinions or viewpoints. Politics can be challenging especially nowadays. But do not judge them. Instead, listen and form your own opinion. We are all different people but that's important to recognize! Let them teach you one thing or another or even teach them a thing or another. Cultural differences are important and vital and will drive your understanding of how people work. This is one of the most valuable experiences that I have gained.

In the end, my main message is to take it easy. Everything will turn out great as long you let it be a lesson and see the message in it. Everything happens for a cause. What you decide the cause to be is what counts. Make it something amazing – you got this!