

“I Want to Go Home!”

A Student Travels Abroad for the First Time

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Tags

Crisis-Management; Education Abroad; Partnerships; Student Services; University/Higher Education

Setting

Claudia is a third-year undergraduate student at a private institution in the US. She is a Communications major focusing on film production and has an interest in Japanese entertainment. She believes that learning about the industry and the language will help her in her future goals. She strives to work in the music industry and live in Japan one day. She applied and was accepted to the exchange program in Tokyo for a semester to help improve her language skills, learn the culture, and gain experience in the country she hoped to work within in the future. Claudia is a first-generation university student who has never traveled outside of her hometown, let alone out of the country. Two of the main concerns she had before her semester abroad were finances and the unknowns of daily life abroad. Her home institution provided her with travel logistics, resources to apply for scholarships, and a pre-departure orientation. In addition, prior to going abroad, students are required to take a cross-cultural training course to help students through the acculturation process (culture shock, homesickness, etc.).

The home and host institution have a bilateral exchange agreement and have successfully sent and received students for years. During the exchange program, students take courses related to their major in English along with Japanese language courses. Upon arrival in Tokyo, students must make their own way to campus during move-in dates. However, the Japanese institution does provide resources to students including orientation. They also offer events and opportunities for students to meet each other.

Case

To help with her finances, Claudia applied for a scholarship and received \$4,000 towards her program. The Education Abroad Office tried to help her find other financial opportunities. Given Claudia's financial concerns, the Education Abroad Office hired her until her departure to help with her finances.

Claudia's program began at the beginning of April, so she had plenty of time to prepare her documents for her visa. Once submitted, she purchased her ticket to Tokyo. After a week, she was nervous that her visa would not get there in time, so she postponed her flight for a few days. Her visa arrived not long after. As she got closer to her departure date, Claudia decided to reschedule her flight again as she was nervous about the arrival time and the housing check-in window.

The Japanese institution does not offer pick up services from the airport, but they do provide information on how to get to campus. When she arrived at the airport, she was able to get a taxi and arrive at her dormitory safely with no issues. The following day, the Education Abroad Advisor, Sofia, received an email from Claudia stating that she wanted to back out and could not carry on with her study abroad program. Upon arrival, Claudia felt overwhelmed, leading to uncontrollable tears and near panic. She was sorry and did not want to disappoint Sofia as she had helped her in many ways. Claudia shared that she was also scared and she might do something bad to herself because she worked hard to get to Japan, but was not happy at all.

After receiving the email, Sofia reached out to Claudia immediately to talk to her and also informed her supervisor of the situation. Within hours, they were able to communicate with Claudia. Sofia asked Claudia how she was doing and to explain what happened. After explaining, Claudia seemed calmer. Sophia encouraged Claudia to try attending class the next day. They asked Claudia to wait and reassess at the end of the week after some opportunities to engage with other students. After the end of the week, Sofia did not hear back from Claudia. Sophia reached out to her a few times and did not get a response. Sofia reached out to the international office at the Japanese institution to see if they can check in on her. After a few days, Sofia received an email from Claudia letting her know that due to financial and family reasons she had to return home early. Claudia apologized for not notifying her as Claudia bought a ticket at the last minute for fear that ticket prices might go up. Claudia had packed and left within 24 hours and did not notify the international education office nor the housing office at the host institution that she was leaving.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What are some consequences that the student might face because of the manner in which Claudia left?
- How could Sofia support Claudia upon her return?
- Is there another program model that may have been more supportive for this student?
- How might this case affect the institution's relationship with their long-standing partner?
- What advising might support first-generation university students at the inquiry, application, pre-departure, travel, and orientation phases of education abroad programs?

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- How might an education abroad office or other student services offices help students that want to study abroad but have limited travel experience and/or limited experience away from their families?