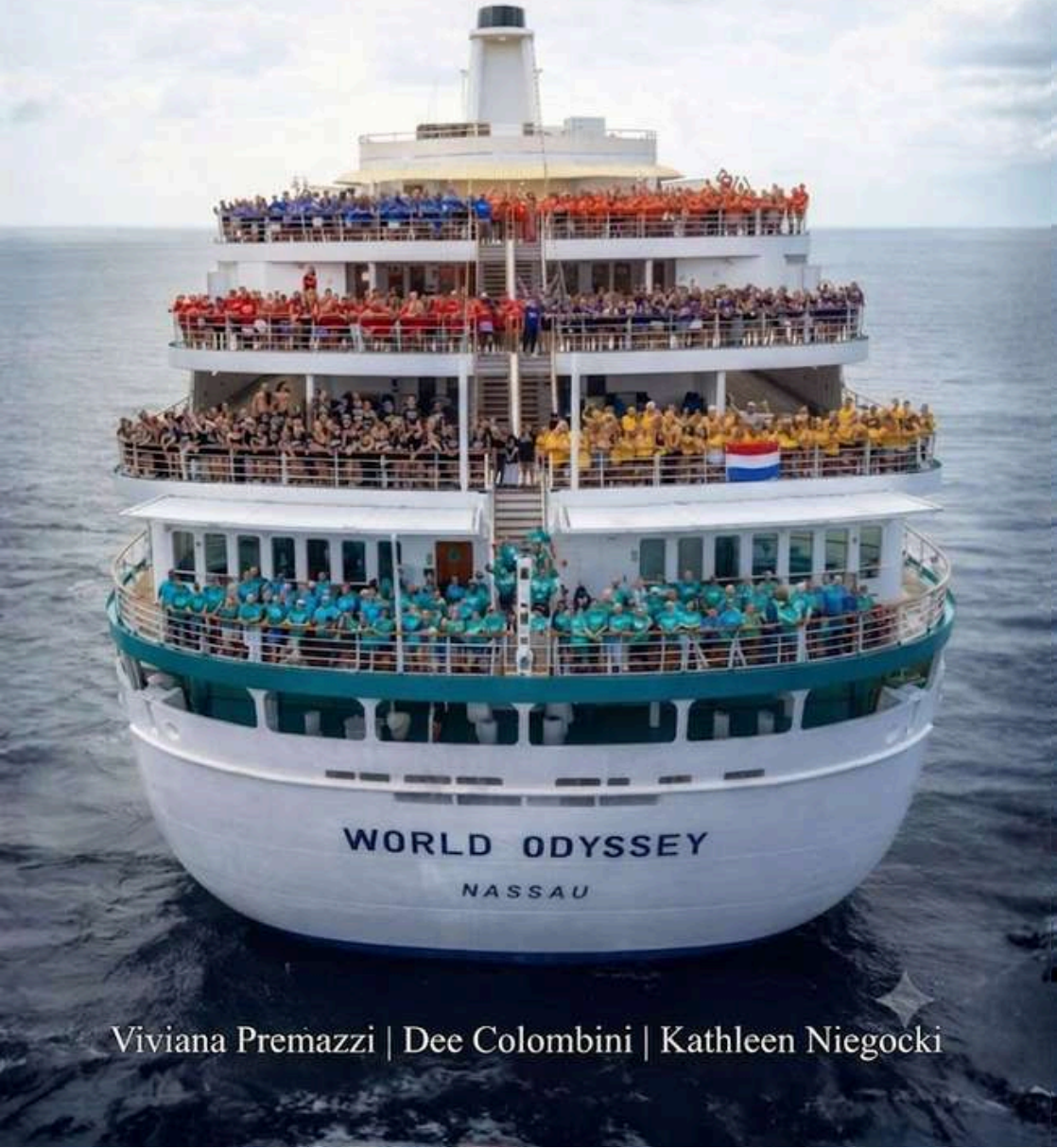
COMING HOME

Life After Semester at Sea



Viviana Premazzi | Dee Colombini | Kathleen Niegocki

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Coming Home
Life After Semester at Sea

First edition
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We are also grateful to our families and friends for your patience, understanding, and encouragement throughout the interviewing and writing process.

We hope this book offers guidance, reassurance, and inspiration to all those who set out on a voyage of discovery, both across the world and within themselves. May the stories shared here remind you that every journey has the power to transform us and connect us more deeply to one another.



Why We Made This Guide

Coming home after Semester at Sea is… a lot.

You've just traveled the world, lived on a literal *ship* with 500 or so new people, changed in ways that are hard to explain, and then

—BOOM—

you're back in your old routines – or jumping into yet another new beginning – as though nothing happened. Except *something* happened. Maybe *everything* happened.

We created this guide because so many voyagers told us the same thing:

"I wish someone had talked about what it's like to come home."

Re-entry is a thing. Whether your voyage was amazing, transformational, complicated, overwhelming, or all of the above, if you go on SAS, you'll go through re-entry. And it's an important process.

There are tons of resources out there to help people prepare *to* study abroad. But when it is time to come home, these resources are harder to find. By offering re-entry programming before disembarkation, SAS is ahead of the curve. But once you've disembarked, there's not always much in place to guide you through the *actual* experience as it's happening. Unlike SAS itself, re-entry can feel like a solitary journey.

So we listened to 30+ Fall 2024 voyagers: students, staculty, lifelong learners, companions, and ship kids who told us what it was really like to come home: the good moments, the confusing ones, the lonely ones, the unexpectedly meaningful ones. This guide blends their stories with what research says helps people adjust after big experiences like yours.

Think of this guide as a friend who's one step ahead of you, sharing what they've learned.

Inside, you'll find common things people may go through after SAS, along with tips from former voyagers about what's helped them navigate the ups and downs of coming home. You will also discover that many of the experiences and recommendations contained in this toolkit could apply to other kinds of re-entry experiences or life transitions, too. Take what fits, skip what doesn't, and know that whatever you're feeling is valid.

Welcome home. We're glad you're here.





FOREWORD BY ANNE HUDGENS
Executive Dean, Voyage 134

I had the great privilege of serving as the Dean of Students on the Fall 2019 voyage and the Executive Dean on the Fall 2024 voyage.

In both these experiences, I watched the magic of the SAS shipboard community come together. Most students and families are focused on the big transition to life on the ship but have no idea that the bigger transition for most will be re-entry.

When voyagers arrive on the ship there are a million transitions from homesickness, sea sickness, maintaining or ending relationships and the difficulty of finding time alone or down time. It does not feel exuberantly life-changing at the time. Just difficult.

While each voyage is different in some ways, there is a rhythm to what occurs. Voyagers acclimate to the ship, start making friends, and then start making real friends based on common values and traveling styles. We share a myriad of travel experiences together. We problem-solve and work things out. The community deepens as people share all these impactful experiences — big and small. Without as many electronic diversions, voyagers hang out, dance, play games, play music, watch the ocean and the stars and develop a comfort with each other unlike most communities.

The staculty watch voyagers grow before our eyes. We are all growing too. Voyagers from the US are learning to become global citizens, see our deeply imbedded American-centric point of view—maybe for the first time. Travel learning and classroom learning are intertwined. Our world just got a lot bigger.

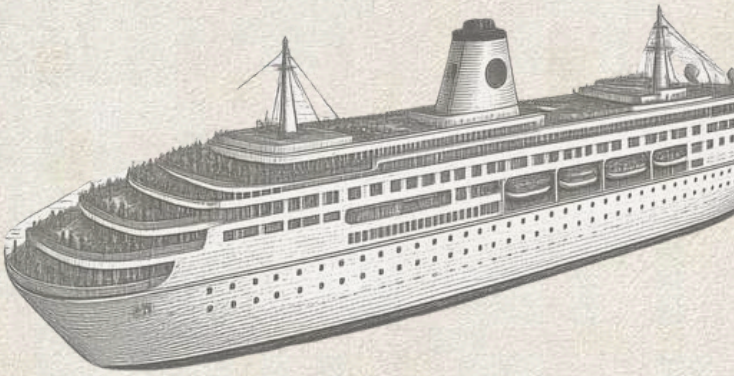
As the voyage begins to wind down it becomes difficult to remember the 'before times'. We both never want it to end, and we are exhausted and need a break. We look forward to going home.

And yet, nothing prepares us for life after Semester at Sea. We have had four months of experiences. No one at home will truly understand. We find that our home people have a much smaller capacity to hear about the experiences than we have the need to talk about them. It's lonely. We have changed. They haven't as much. We miss our SAS people. We miss the ship. We miss having the whole range of life stages in front of us, from the ship kids to the life long learners. We miss living in a much bigger world.

The re-entry conversation is so important. I am so grateful to our team of authors to tackle the re-entry experience. It has now been 17 months since I returned. I think about our voyage literally every day.

My love to all.

Dean Anne Hudgens



FOREWORD BY LAURA STROHMINGER
ISE Chief Program Officer

My first voyage with Semester at Sea was Fall 2001, where I served as a Residence Director. I was 27 years old and had been working in a full time professional role for just over three years. While I had longed to travel since I was a child, this voyage was my first experience outside of North America. I was thrilled and terrified. We set sail on August 31, 2001. Before we even reached our first port, the September 11 attacks happened in the U.S. While I had expected an incredible opportunity to learn and grow, I could not have anticipated the profound impact traveling the globe following this event would have on my experience. I was forced to process a changing world through a global lens as part of a deeply connected floating community. Little did I know, this voyage would completely alter my life path.

I truly believe that the unique community developing aboard the ship is what makes the Semester at Sea experience so transformational. Living in an intentional, intergenerational community while navigating different places and cultures deepens the experience in ways a traditional campus cannot match. Participants form bonds that last a lifetime, and alumni overwhelmingly report that their voyage was the most impactful semester of their university experience.

Yet, as Viviana, Dee, and Kathleen point out, voyagers are often left to navigate the complex re-entry home after this life-changing experience alone. Having had the chance to sail briefly with Viviana, Dee, and Kathleen myself, I witnessed firsthand their immense dedication to student learning and support. I am not at all surprised that they have collaborated to create this vital resource to continue supporting not only their fellow shipmates, but future students and staculty as well.

I am so grateful to them for writing *Coming Home: Life After Semester at Sea* and for collecting these powerful stories. I resonate deeply with the many coming-home challenges they outline: mixed emotions, a shifted identity, an unknown future, and the frustration of trying to explain this massive experience to people back home who didn't quite get it. I certainly faced all of these during my own difficult re-entry. I returned to a home country that had changed significantly while I was gone, and I had changed significantly too.

I hadn't realized how much I would miss my shipmates. After living in close quarters for four months, I thought I would delight in my own space. I was wrong. Finding ways to relate to family and friends while navigating my "what next" was a massive challenge.

By talking with the alumni of Voyage 134, the authors have clearly identified the universal hurdles participants face. The stories and quotes they share allow readers to realize they are not alone in what they are feeling, and their insights provide a wonderful compass for navigating re-entry. I especially appreciate the reflection questions, which offer a meaningful opportunity to continue learning and growing long after the voyage ends. I fully intend to share this book with our future students and staculty, knowing it will be a welcome guide as they face this challenging transition.

Laura

About SAS

Founded in 1963, Semester at Sea (SAS) is a global study abroad program that transforms a ship into a floating university. During each 100+ day voyage, approximately 450–500 undergraduate students, together with faculty and staff, lifelong learners, families, and an international crew, travel to ten or more countries while combining academic courses with immersive learning around the world.

More than a study abroad program, Semester at Sea is an extraordinary living-learning community. Classes take place while the ship is at sea, and each port becomes an extension of the classroom through field classes, cultural experiences, service projects, and independent exploration. The close-knit shipboard environment fosters deep friendships, personal growth, and cross-cultural learning in ways few educational experiences can.

This guide is based on Voyage 134 (Fall 2024), which traveled aboard the MV World Odyssey from Europe to Africa and Asia, visiting Portugal, Morocco, Ghana, South Africa, Mauritius, India, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Thailand. While every voyage is unique, the experiences described here reflect themes shared by generations of Semester at Sea participants.

Throughout this guide, you'll see a few terms unique to the SAS community:

- **Staculty**: Staff and faculty members who live and work aboard the ship.
- **Lifelong Learners**: Adult participants who sail alongside students and audit classes.
- **Ship Kids**: Children of staculty who live aboard during the voyage and attend the onboard school.
- **Travel Companions**: Spouses, partners, family members, or other dependents who accompany staculty during the voyage.

Introductions By The Authors

Viviana

Bangkok, 22 December 2024, disembarkation day

"I love you! I love you so much! I love you all!"
"I'll miss you! I will miss the ship and, OMG, the crew!!!"
"Can I give you one last hug?"
"Will you come visit me soon?"
"You'll call me soon, right?"
"Will you take care of yourself?"
"I cannot believe it…"

"It will be so difficult back home…"

January/February 2025, first months after SAS

"Where are you now?"
"How many hours ahead?"
"Can we try video call?"

"Was it real?"
"Did I dream about it? Did we dream about?"
"I don't know what to do"
"I am letting life take control"
"I need to do what people expected me to do since I left"
"I just want to cry"
"Take me back!"
"Can we plan a reunion soon?"





These are some of the reasons why I decided to launch the video series *Coming Home. Life after SAS* and now to write this book.

It wasn't just me.

We were a community during the voyage, and we remained a community afterward. And many of us, myself included, for many different reasons, found it incredibly difficult to re-adjust. I had students and colleagues who called me in tears, trying to make sense of what they were going through. I cried too, and sometimes, when I look back, I still do. There was so much happening in our minds and in our lives.

Maybe we needed a place to meet, to breathe, to share, to reflect and to find, together, a way to move forward.

A video call can never replace a hug, but seeing someone's face, their smile, their tears, can still give you that feeling of proximity, of connection. You are not alone. We are here. We understand you. We lived something incredible, indescribable, an experience of a lifetime. And we need time and grace to process it.

Yes, it's a privileged process.
Absolutely.

I was extraordinarily privileged to have the honor of serving with Semester at Sea, and it truly is a "first-world problem" to feel emotionally low after returning from four months of work on a ship that traveled the world and stopped in ten beautiful countries. But a privileged life is still a life made of relationships and emotions.

SAS gave me so many challenges and reasons to question myself, but it also gave me so much in terms of relationships and emotions and then, suddenly, it was gone. And working on the ship was a go-go-go kind of life that didn't give me the time to reflect on what I was living. And then it abruptly ended. After a 19-hour flight, a different language, a different climate, reconnecting with my

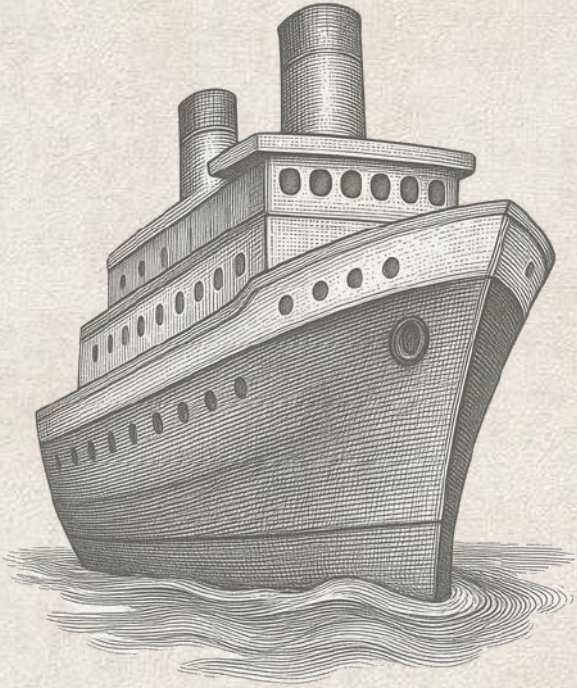
"other friends," my "other family," my "other loved ones"…

I deeply believe in the power of relationships and of the community. And when I can't find the strength to help myself alone, I have learned to turn to others. Healing and grieving are individual processes, but the experiences, words and reflections of others can be profoundly supportive. They help you feel "normal". They validate you. They make you feel seen. They help you forgive yourself and love yourself again.

This is, for me, what this project is about: acknowledging that sometimes we need others to overcome our challenges, whether they are about readjustment, a breakup, recovering after a loss or other transitions in life.

A big thanks to everyone who bravely contributed, sharing their stories, challenges and coping strategies to help our community, to my amazing colleagues Dee Colombini and Kathleen Niegocki, who believed and supported my idea, and to Emma Henriksen (DeCaro), who helped us make the video series accessible. Thank you for being part of this journey and for keeping our community alive.

Authentic to the Core, Voyage 134!



Dee

It is a difficult decision to put one's life on hold to go on a semester-long voyage for all of the sensible reasons – I think I get sea sick, what about my job, the kids are in school, who will take care of the house, the pets, I think I get sea sick, did I mention I get sea sick?

Turns out that yes indeed, I do get sea sick, in fact it was a constant feature for me. And though I did miss out on some events and opportunities, at the end of each day, I was still able to see and do so many amazing things. SAS was one of the best things that I have ever done. It was life-altering and I am so grateful that I did it.

Coming home was a mix of emotions. I did not anticipate how difficult re-entry would be. I experienced so much joy seeing my family waiting for me at the airport. I was happy to return to my family, friends, pets, and my home. But I also missed my SAS friends and fellow voyagers, the ship staff, the countries we visited, the newness and novelty of each port, the ship rocking me to sleep at night, the sea birds, flying fish, the stars, and the simple magnificence of the sea.

I had to re-navigate my pre-voyage social environments. I left the autonomy and flexibility of working on a small professional team to return to work in a very large university system. I returned to a relationship of interdependence with my partner after the experience of full autonomy and independence. It wasn't just me making all the choices. And then there were all the responsibilities I had left behind. Well, they were still here when I returned.

The new year was particularly hard. The winter was cold. Not much was happening in my small college town during winter break. I felt so guilty to admit that I felt bored. How could this ever be enough?

Oh no! Am I ruined?

Ironically, I turned back to SAS for support. I was thrilled when Viviana invited me to help conduct the interviews for the *Coming Home* project. The interview process helped me to feel connected to SAS. There was so much insight and great advice.



I felt better. I thought, this is the answer. Collectively it is the voyagers who hold the wisdom to cope and thrive. I believed that others might benefit from what we learned from our fellow voyagers. And so, here we are, sharing the *Coming Home eBook*. Happy travels!



Kathleen

On July 30th, 2023, I finally said okay to the part of me that knew. My intuition had been begging me to let go of the current version of my life, which had long passed its Best By date. That day, my birthday, I ran a tiny experiment: I "acted as if" I'd leave my job of seven years (which I once happily believed I'd *retire* from) after only one more academic year, 2023-24. I felt buoyant all day… a clarity and relief I couldn't ignore.

That night, I checked Semester at Sea's jobs webpage. This was not a new behavior. I'd been checking the site intermittently as a procrastination tactic / escape fantasy for years. But this time there was an open Counselor position. They were hiring – *right then!* – for Fall 2024. A few days and conversations later, I clicked Submit.

~~~

I read an essay recently, *The Science of Why Travel Changes You More Than Therapy* by Sage Lewis. While I objected to Lewis's simplistic (mis)understandings of psychotherapy, I felt a click of recognition in these words that articulated previously inarticulable parts of my experience, and those of others I knew in my counseling role:

> *Travel breaks the illusion that your current life is the only possible one.*
>
> *Distance—whether physical, temporal, or psychological—liberates the mind from "functional fixedness," the cognitive bias that locks us into seeing things only one way.*
>
> *Travel temporarily strips away social roles. At home, you're someone's employee, partner, parent, or child. Those identities come with expectations, pressures, and inherited narratives about who you're supposed to be. On the road, those labels weaken… this loss of identity pressure allows people to hear their real desires for the first time.*
~~~



Travel adds uncertainty, but in a manageable, even exhilarating way. You get lost. You miss trains. You solve problems in real-time with imperfect information. And you survive. You more than survive—you often discover you're more capable than you believed. This quietly restores self-trust in ways that feel almost alchemical.

~~~

Coming home from SAS was hard for me. Longing. Lethargy. Guilt for not being happier. Restlessness. Judginess. The jobless abyss and needing to figure out work. Things I didn't bother trying to talk about. Things I wanted to keep private. Wishing I could go back and do some things over. Judging myself for falling into old patterns and not being this dramatically different new and improved person (HAHAHAHA, but for real though). Fearing I had lost the aliveness I'd felt on the voyage.

This *Coming Home* project is what most helped me accept the challenges. *Of course...* I wasn't immune (to this very human experience!) just because I was a therapist, or had studied abroad before, or had "only" spent mere days in each port country. *It all belonged.*

This project also helped me appreciate the full panorama of my post-SAS life. The rare magic of transitions and liminal spaces. Growth's inevitability. The both/and. The way SAS brought me to my current job.

~~~

I remember SAS through songs, sentence fragments, specific breezes, and memories of things I ate and drank (UGHHHHH that Ca Phe Dua from Trung Nguyen Legend!).

But the best thing is when I realize that I'm back there again. Not literally. But back in precisely the same FEELINGS that I'd most savored and cherished on SAS… Aliveness. Wonder. Spontaneity. Adventurousness. Effervescence. Open-heartedness. Capability. Connectedness. It's certainly not all the time, but when I catch myself in one of those feeling states, I can't help but smile and try to linger awhile.



How To Use This Book

"It was one of the greatest adventures of my life." (Companion)

Now that we've shared some background about SAS, our own experiences, and the origins of the *Coming Home* project, we want to turn toward the stories and wisdom of fellow Voyage 134 voyagers. Over the course of our interviews, people spoke candidly about what it was like to come home after such an intense and meaningful experience.

Although every person's re-entry journey was different, a number of common themes emerged across the conversations.

This guide combines personal reflections, practical insights, and opportunities for self-reflection. Each section explores a different part of the re-entry experience – from the excitement of coming home to the challenges, complexities, and growth that can follow. At the end of the book, you'll find reflection questions designed to help you process your experience and gain a deeper understanding of your re-entry journey.



Things We Missed About The Voyage

Coming home means saying goodbye to the voyage, to all of it. It can create a sense of grief and loss. There are many things that voyage 134 participants loved about SAS and miss now that the voyage is over.

We missed the places we visited, the people and communities, the comfort of being taken care of and the unique opportunity of being at sea. We missed the in-country places and experiences and adventure.

COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION

Life onboard Semester at Sea is very social and structured. Students, staculty, lifelong learners, ship kids, and companions live, study, eat, and travel together every day. The beloved crew of the MV World Odyssey form another special thread in the social fabric of SAS. This togetherness creates a strong sense of community. Many voyagers enjoy the constant companionship, although some may also miss having more privacy.

After returning home, you might be missing the people, shared meals, daily routines, and feeling of connection onboard. If you felt that sense of close community, leaving that might feel like losing a family and may lead to feelings of loneliness or sadness during the adjustment back home.

I miss the uniqueness of the community. (Staculty)

I miss the ease of connection on the ship where everyone was five minutes away; back at "regular school," I found it weird to have to intentionally ask people to hang out instead of just walking up to a group. (Student)

And then being ripped away from what felt like a new family I had made—I was sad. I'm not going to lie. I was very sad. (Student)

COMFORT AND CARE

Months of not having to cook a meal, clean the bathroom, or make your own bed was quite a luxury indeed, and it left us with more time and energy to focus on the journey without the distraction and pull of life's usual demands. Upon stepping into one of the two ship restaurants, you were greeted by name by one of the beloved crew (who also managed to remember how you like your coffee!). Many of us have stories of moments when a crew member went out of their way for us, or showed us kindness and care just as a family member might.

While everyone adjusts in their own way to having these daily tasks handled for them, a number of the voyagers we interviewed reflected that they missed the ease of not having to think about those things – these concrete ways that they had felt taken care of.

Upon coming home, we were met with the realities of life. Some spoke of taking care of families, siblings, and returning to school and work.

What I missed was the normal things on the ship: someone cooks for you, does your laundry, makes your bed. Back on land, I had to do everything myself again. (Staculty)

On SAS, I didn't have to worry about anything. Everything was taken care of: meals, cleaning, structure. Coming home meant reacquiring all those responsibilities again. (Student)

I had to do all my chores myself – no one taking care of me. (Companion)

SHIP LIFE

Ship life followed a distinct schedule. There was a daily routine, a structure that brought familiarity and comfort. This included scheduled meals, classes, nightly lectures, evening activities. Voyagers fell into the rhythm. And the days with special events (Sea Olympics, Talent shows, Neptune Day, etc.) were especially cherished by many voyagers.

Beyond the ebbs and flows of days aboard the MV World Odyssey, the ship was our floating home. And for many voyagers, the ship truly "felt like Home." Many SASers, us included, missed that home we'd come to know and love.

I miss the SAS morning routine, the daily structure. (Staculty)

I really missed the rhythm of life on the ship and having that schedule... that has been difficult to try to find back on land. (Staculty)

I was Sea Captain for my Sea and we just had the most fun day. You're able to see everybody just get so involved in their own unique way. Everybody was having fun, no one was thinking about school or responsibilities, we were able to just play and hang out with each other. The Sea Olympics was a highlight for sure. (Student)

The ship really felt like home. You'd return from a port and think, "Ah, that's home." It's a beautiful thing. Your home follows you around on the voyage. (Companion)

LIFE IN PORT

"Variety is the spice of life."

In a study published in *Nature Neuroscience* (2020), the authors found that people tend to be happier on days filled with greater novelty and exploration.

Each SAS port offered its own adventure, a sense of newness and even awe. We could explore unique sights, smells, and sounds: bustling markets, museums, historic landmarks, and natural wonders. And then there was the diversity of food —ranging from street vendors to five-star restaurants to home-cooked meals. So many things to experience!

When we asked fellow voyagers to share their favorite SAS memories, many spoke of unforgettable moments experienced in port—or even the joy and excitement of watching as we arrived at each destination.

We asked a woman on a bike in Amsterdam, "How do we get to the Old City Center?" She smiled, pointed in the general direction and said, "Follow, your nose." "Follow our nose?" "Just follow your nose!" This became my motto for the voyage. (Staculty)

Pulling into port is a slow process – the anticipation is like a present waiting to be unwrapped. (Staculty)

I went on the field program where we took a camel trek out to the Sahara Desert and slept in nomad tents... when we arrived at the camp, it was practically nighttime. And then I looked up. I cannot tell you how awestruck I was at the beauty of such a pure, lit-up sky of stars. (Student)

We were driving with our tour guide when he pointed and said, "That's my grandmother's house." Then he casually asked, "Do you want to stop in for tea?" Of course we said yes! So we spent time with his whole family — having tea, cookies, and conversation. It's just not something that would happen anywhere else. That's a memory I'll carry forever . (Student)

We visited Deaf schools and learned about the communities in different countries. That cultural experience was so powerful for me — it changed how I see so many things. (Companion)

LIFE AT SEA

Living at sea is a unique experience.

Nothing can quite describe the days at sea out on the open ocean, traveling the world. There was joy in watching the sea life, the birds, flying fish, and when very lucky a glimpse at dolphins, and whales. There was the peacefulness of a morning on deck, watching the ocean sunsets, rainbows, sunrises, and the stars and the endless horizon. And many of us came to appreciate the way that our limited access to the internet while on the ship helped us to be more present.

I could just step outside and have this beautiful ocean view. (Ship kid)

I enjoyed whales, sharks, and wildlife in the sea. (Student)

I really enjoyed the peacefulness every morning watching the ocean. I got up pretty early and went to the gym regularly, then went outside before sunrise to watch the ocean. It was very peaceful... That was one of the most enjoyable things, and I really miss that now being back on land. (Staculty)

We had almost no internet connectivity when we were on the ship. It really allowed us to kind of be here now, and I missed that the most. (Student)

I think what I miss most... is being at sea… I could visit all these places by airplane, but I could never get back the experience of being on the ship, being on the water. (Staculty)

Now I think what I really miss the most is coming up on deck and watching the world change around me. Unless you do it, you cannot understand what that is. It's transformative. (Staculty)



If Your Voyage Wasn't What You'd Hoped

If your voyage *didn't* feel super magical and amazing, you're not alone.

Some voyagers come home with experiences that were difficult, disappointing, or painful. It can be lonely and frustrating when everything you see or hear from fellow voyagers has this aura of perfection. Or when you come home and people assume you had the time of your life, or at least that you have nothing worth complaining about. It may feel uncomfortable to talk about the hard parts, but it's so important.

Because it's real and true.

Because our human experience is *never* all good.

Because concealing or denying what's hard can lead to disconnection and shame.

And because when we take the risk of being honest about the bad, we will likely find at least one person who gets it, and that will make all the difference.



Coming Home: Post-Voyage Challenges

After SAS, the three of us returned to our scattered corners of the world.

Back home in Colorado, New York and Malta, each of us found ourselves struggling much more than we'd anticipated. And each of us were simultaneously pulled by two interwoven desires: to understand what was happening for us, and to not be alone with it.

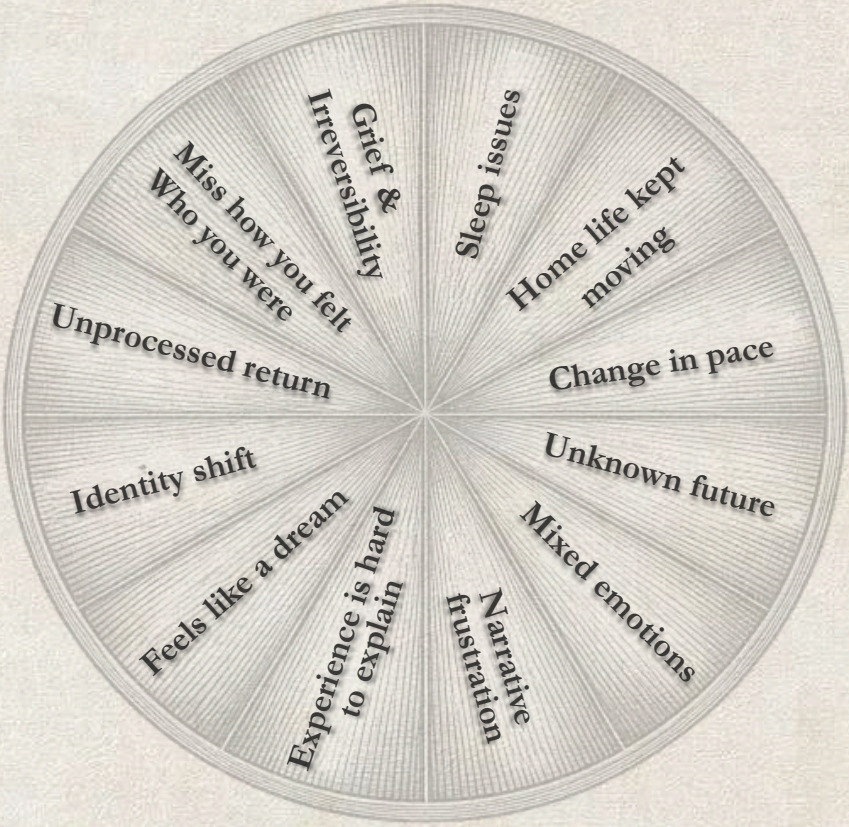
So we started talking. (We're therapists and intercultural communication specialists, after all, it's what we do!). SAS friends reached out to us and we started asking ourselves,

Is this normal?
Is it just me?
Is this hard for you, too?

The more honest we were, the more we learned we were not alone. Other people clearly wanted to share and be understood, too. And so the conversations grew.

During our interviews, we invited voyagers to share the biggest struggles they encountered upon coming home. Below are the most typical challenges people shared. A couple of things to note: first, not everyone found re-entry particularly challenging but many did. And second, the list below is not exhaustive – it's based on what people volunteered to share in a public-facing interview. So if you don't see your struggles reflected here, please know this doesn't mean you are alone.

POST VOYAGE CHALLENGES



MIXED EMOTIONS

Coming home after Semester at Sea often brings mixed emotions. Many voyagers described feeling happy to reunite with family and friends and to get back to aspects of "regular life," while simultaneously grieving the end of an experience that felt deeply meaningful. These feelings often exist at the same time, not one after the other. Returning home can feel comforting and painful, grounding and disorienting, exciting and disappointing all at once.

Because of this, returning to normal life can feel complicated indeed. Many voyagers said they had not expected to feel so many different and intense emotions at once during re-entry.

Yes, it was both wonderful and heart-wrenching. I was excited to reunite with my grandchildren and husband, but it was also so hard to leave such a beautiful, life-changing experience. (Companion)

It was really hard at first. I spent so much time missing my family while I was away, and then I came back and missed my SAS friends! (Student)

I think my single favorite memory was the final week on the ship… It was bittersweet. (Student)

SLEEP

Voyage 134 traveled through many time zones, so we were frequently adjusting our clocks – literally and biologically. The West-to-East voyage, which ours was, is particularly challenging because the body has to keep readjusting to falling asleep *earlier*. Voyagers of other SAS journeys confirm this! Biologically it is harder to ask our body to fall asleep earlier than it is to ask our body to stay up later. As a result, we were often adjusting to ship-lag.

To add to the ship-lag, upon return voyagers expressed surprise at how strongly they were impacted by jet lag. Some voyagers experienced extreme tiredness and slept for much of the first week back. Others experienced a flipped sleep/wake schedule and slept at random hours throughout the day. On average, it takes about one day per time zone to get back to a normal sleep routine. So, depending on one's travel, it could take 1 to 2 weeks before getting back to a regular sleep schedule.

I wanted to lay down in a museum, I was having a hard time staying awake in public spaces. (Staculty)

I had to sleep the exhaustion away and then I was tired. (Staculty)

. . . jet lag – I slept for a week! (Student)



THE WORLD KEPT MOVING AT HOME

Another challenge we experienced upon coming home is that time did not stand still while we were gone. Life moved on (without us) for everyone else.

Some of us might have been expected to jump back into our usual roles and responsibilities before we'd even caught our breath. Furthermore, it's not uncommon to come home to changes, including difficult ones. Voyagers shared vulnerably with us about this… about returning to problems at work, or discovering unexpected changes at school, or noticing shifts in their personal relationships. Some of us returned home to face the illness or loss of a family member or a cherished pet. As those of us who sailed know, a lot can change in a short period of time. And this can become another adjustment.

There were challenges at work that had happened while I was gone, which were tough to return to. Some things just fall into your lap when you get back. (Companion)

School was dramatically harder. At first, I was excited, but when I was right outside my classroom, I stalled because I didn't want to go in. It felt weird to go back to the place I had been four days before I went on Semester at Sea. I felt more comfortable over time, but there were some things, like I couldn't remember my iPad password, so I couldn't do schoolwork for a week or two. My teacher also had different stations and invented names for them, and I didn't know any of them. (Ship kid)

. . . I only had about three weeks before I had to start teaching again at my university. That quick transition made it hard to truly reset. Life didn't stop while I was gone. . .
so there was a lot of catch-up to do when I returned. (Staculty)

THE CHANGE IN PACE

Semester at Sea has a fast and intense rhythm. Life is always moving, with classes, social activities, and constant travel between countries. Each day brings something new, and time is shaped by ports and arrivals. There is a constant sense of anticipation about what comes next.

For many voyagers, when they return home, that pace slows suddenly. Life for many becomes much quieter and more routine. Time may feel slower, and days may no longer feel filled with new experiences or movement. Many people miss not just the travel, but the feeling that something new was always happening. At home, the question shifts from "What will happen today?" to "How do I fill my day?"

The transition was like I was used to a million things going on every day and researching and thinking about this port and anticipating 10 problems and you know everything's coming at you, all the time, for four months, every day, and then all of a sudden, it was quiet. (Staculty)

Here's something weird I noticed: on SAS, we measured time by country. People would say, "I haven't done that since India," or "We haven't hung out since Ghana."
Back home, if you said that, people would look at you like you're crazy. (Student)

After New Year's, the quiet set in. I found myself thinking, "If I were on SAS right now, I'd be planning my next port." I went from an exciting, spontaneous lifestyle to something that felt very… mundane. (Student)

Life here is more routine and slower paced. On the ship, things changed constantly — new opportunities every day. I miss that chaos a bit. It kept me going. (Student)

I think it was the sudden stop of experiencing new things, because that's what a lot of SAS was: just constantly gaining new experiences and doing new and cool and crazy things. And it was weird to just kind of immediately go back to "regular." (Student)

UNKNOWN FUTURE

Returning home can feel for some like losing structure. Life on the ship had a clear schedule, classes, and something to look forward to at every port. Back home, especially if you don't have a job or school right away, that structure disappears. You may suddenly have a lot of free time, and it can feel confusing or even empty. It might be hard to stay motivated or feel like your time has a clear purpose.

Coming home can feel especially difficult if you don't have a clear next step (for example, if you quit a job before the voyage, or graduated while on SAS, or are a recently retired lifelong learner). You may no longer have the role you had before (such as student, or employee). This can leave you wondering what you are supposed to do next. Without a clear structure or direction, it can feel like you are starting over. This uncertainty can make you question your place and your path, as you begin to build a new chapter of your life.

Coming back was hard. I did Semester at Sea during a really big time of transition in my life. I had left a job I'd been at for a long time…. I wasn't coming back to a known job or any job. I was coming back to sort of this abyss of the unknown, with pressure to figure out what I was doing next. That definitely added to the challenge. Also didn't have any structure I was returning to. (Staculty)

I think what's been hardest for me was also the fact that I came back from Semester at Sea, such a life-changing experience. I also graduated and I no longer have my apartment, I'm not in my college town with all my friends anymore. There was just a halt in, basically I had a life before Semester at Sea, and this life after Semester at Sea is completely different.
I think getting adjusted to that was tough. (Student)

IT'S HARD TO EXPLAIN SAS TO PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T THERE

Talking about Semester at Sea can be hard. It was deeply meaningful, but also difficult to explain. Traveling across many countries can't be summed up in a short story or a brief conversation. It can be quite frustrating to figure out what to share and how. For example, saying too little can feel like an oversimplification – or even like hiding an important part of yourself, while saying too much can feel tiresome or overwhelming. Many voyagers shared about the challenge of translating such a big and unique life experience (with so many experiences within the experience!) into words, particularly in brief social exchanges.

Another common challenge – both for our fellow SAS voyagers and for many people coming home from study abroad or similar international experiences – was that people did not really understand their experience. Or they may not even seem interested in listening or trying to understand. In this way, the difficulty of telling others is not just about communication. It is also about relationships. When another person shows interest and understanding, we feel seen and accepted. When we don't receive that, we might feel lonely, disappointed, resentful, or disconnected from others, even from people we are close to. We might be tempted to stop trying to explain it at all, or share only with others who were also on the ship.

One of the most challenging parts for me has been trying to express the experience to people back home. People ask, "What was your favorite thing?"—but there's just no way to summarize it in one answer. It's hard to communicate the depth of what we experienced. (Staculty)



I think people at work were only superficially interested in my experience. It's like you've had this life-changing experience, but life moved on for everyone else. (Companion)

No matter how you communicate it to someone else it wasn't their experience and they'll never fully understand. (Student)

It was difficult talking about SAS with people who hadn't been there. When people asked, "How was your trip?" all I could say was "It was great." But it was so much more than that. You can't explain it all in a sentence. That disconnect was hard. (Student)

IT FEELS LIKE A DREAM

After returning, some people worry that Semester at Sea will start to feel less real over time. If you cannot relive that, or if you cannot talk about it, what was it? As normal life takes over, the voyage can begin to feel like a dream or something far away. Our experiences feel more psychologically "real" when they are witnessed, shared, and understood by others. If you can't explain Semester at Sea in a way others understand it can similarly start to feel like it doesn't fully "fit" into normal life. And you are wondering, "Was it real?"

There can also be a fear that memories, insights, and feelings from the experience will fade, not because they weren't important, but because everyday life and people around you don't remind you of them. Forgetting can feel like a kind of loss. People may worry that something life-changing will become just a story or a memory, instead of something still present in who they are.

I feel like I need to write all the memories of the voyage, all these things down before because they do start to escape you a little bit. (Staculty)

And I think part of the frustration I have is the fear of forgetting: if I can't talk about SAS, if I can express it now, will I lose it later? Interviewer: "That's real grief. That sadness of knowing something special is slipping away". Yes. I've even wondered, "Was it all a dream?" (Staculty)

When I left Hong Kong I told my friend, "I feel like I am in a dream, these past few months have just gone by so quick." It all came by in such a blink. When I do see those videos, while it does feel like a dream, it does help me really place myself back in that feeling and that environment mentally. (Student)

IDENTITY SHIFT. WHO AM I?

You may start asking yourself: Who am I now? Who was I before?

Semester at Sea doesn't just teach you new facts; it may change how you see yourself, other people, and the world. Classes may challenge your usual beliefs and ways of thinking. Experiences in different countries can make things feel more complex. After traveling and encountering many cultures, you may feel more open, flexible, and global in how you see yourself. You may feel conflicted or confused about your values and beliefs.

But when you return home, things may feel different. Even though your home hasn't changed, you have. Familiar places and routines can feel strange or limiting. You may feel disconnected from daily life, conversations, or even the person you used to be. It might even feel like you are two different people: who you became during the journey, and who you are expected to be at home. It takes time to bring these parts together.

A number of voyagers described feeling caught between different versions of themselves, or having new realizations about their changing identities, or not knowing yet what they wanted, where they belonged, or what would come next.

I'm looking forward to the next challenge because SAS made me realize some aspects of me, strengths I didn't know I had, ideas I never would have had before. And then I got back home and very quickly fell into my same old routine. It felt more boring than usual. (Staculty)

It was an experience not only externally but also internally: asking a lot of questions about who I am, what I want to do with my life, where my beliefs come from, and how they're changing on this journey. (Student)



THE UNPROCESSED RETURN

Not only might it have felt difficult – or even impossible – to process your SAS experience while the voyage was unfolding, but coming home might not provide enough time and space to process it, either.

Upon returning, you might be immediately pulled back into family commitments, school or work, projects you paused for SAS, or other promises demanding your full attention. Tending to such responsibilities while you're still mentally and emotionally processing what you lived through can create a gap between everyday life and inner reflection.

On the outside, life moves forward, but on the inside, the experience is still being understood and integrated.

"There's a place I'm going…
If I breathe real slowly…
Let it out and let it in."
(Matt Simon, Catch and Release)

I didn't have a lot of time to sit and reflect on the transition —it was just go-go-go. And one of the most challenging parts for me has been trying to express the experience to people back home. (Staculty)

Thinking back and all the memories coming back — just thinking of one day, it's so many fragments. If I try to bring them together, it's like, 'Wait, did all of that happen in just that day?' (Student)

You need time to consider, to decompress… to formulate your ideas and memories, and to reflect on what it all meant. (Staculty)

So not only am I coming home from SAS, but I'm also starting at a new school… I had a couple weeks of buffer, but it was pretty sudden. (Student)



MISSING HOW YOU FELT AND WHO YOU WERE

Returning home can also bring emotional and social discomfort. Familiar environments may now feel more rigid, slow, harsh, or limiting after months of experiencing different cultures and ways of living. This can create frustration or disappointment with everyday social norms.

Many people also feel the need to "adjust back" by rebuilding emotional or social boundaries that had felt more open during the voyage.

This is not just missing travel, but a deeper adjustment to bringing this different way of being – one that felt more open, curious, and flexible – into your life back home.

While we were on the ship, there was a kind of bubble—a physical, emotional, even technological buffer from all of that. But coming back into a politicized, high-pressure work environment has been hard. (Staculty)

A feeling I didn't expect was anger. I felt this angry feeling the second I got out of the baggage claim at my airport, immediately. It was crazy traffic, people honking and yelling at each other. That bothered me. It made me feel like… there was this sense of welcoming and warmth, and now immediately I felt like I had to have my guard back up. (Student)

I think I've come to the realization that yes, it was absolutely reality, but it was a different reality… I think it's the intensity. I think it's the constant exploration, if not a country, then yourself. Because the boat had so much emphasis on that too. I miss it a lot. I think it is the mindset that I'm missing, the constant strive for growth. (Student)

GRIEF, LOSS, AND THE IRREPLICABILITY OF THE EXPERIENCE

Grief is a common but often unspoken feeling after returning. It is not like grief after a loss such as a death, but something more unclear. What is "lost" still exists, but no longer in daily life.

One of the hardest parts of returning is realizing that SAS cannot be repeated in the same way. People grieve the unique community onboard. The ship created a rare environment where students, faculty, and staff lived and learned closely together, with a strong sense of shared purpose.

The people, timing, and experience all came together only once.

It is also grieving something that keeps living without you because there will be another voyage soon, the ship sails on, new students and staculty on board, and this even before you have had time to process your own. You may feel disbelief or even resentment. Questions emerge: *Who are these people on the ship now? Who is interacting with the crew? It was us just days ago.* The speed with which the program renews itself can make former participants feel prematurely replaced, intensifying the sense of loss. This can bring sadness or frustration as it is the loss of something intense and unique.

I think one of the most difficult things after SAS is that you realize you cannot travel as freely as before. The Semester at Sea semester is just something you cannot replace in your life. As a student, you have to face a lot of pressure with career plans, studies, and you can't just go free out there. It feels like that period of time can never come back again. You have to admit it. (Student)

Back home, if you want to do something adventurous, you have to go out and choose it. But on SAS, the adventure comes to you. That's what I loved, it made it easier to do things you wouldn't have thought to do otherwise. (Student)



The last week on the ship, I had so many honest, vulnerable conversations, because we all knew: this exact group of people will never be together again. Yes, I'll see some of my close friends again—but it won't be this exact moment ever again. So that week was about doing everything you'd always meant to do, and saying everything you'd always meant to say. It was beautiful. (Student)

There's no way to replicate that environment elsewhere. (Staculty)

That group will likely not ever be together again… and I had to kind of grieve that, honestly. (Staculty)

Coming Home: Coping Strategies, Resources, And Opportunities

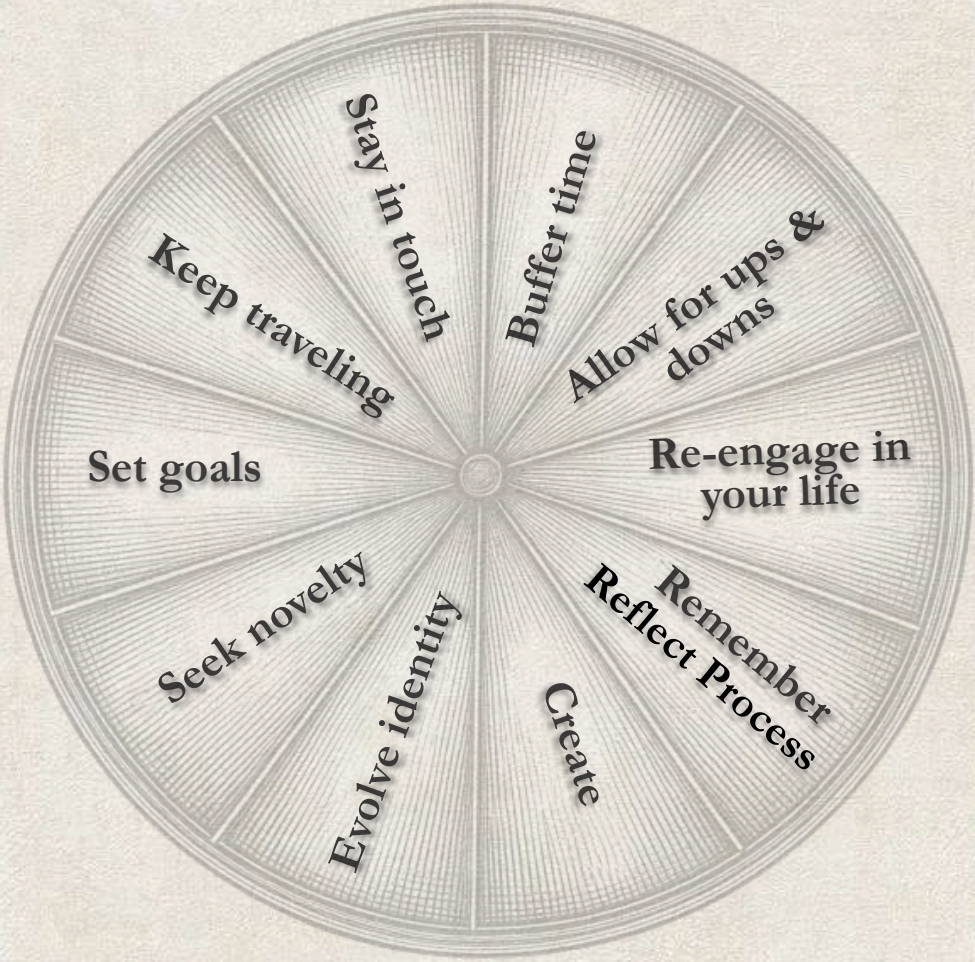
These suggestions come partly from the literature on re-entry but mostly directly from returned SASers who spoke to us a few months post-disembarkation. Consider this their gift to you. Whether you are having a hard time with re-entry, or you're just seeking some inspiration, we hope you find something useful within the offerings below.

If there's one thing we hope you take away from this section, it's this:
This time after coming home matters,
and it affords us opportunities,
even in the midst of challenges.

You are still in a powerful window of transition – one where reflection, change, insight, and new directions are especially possible. It may feel disorienting, but it's also fertile ground for growth.



COPING STRATEGIES, RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES



ALLOW UPS AND DOWNS

By now, we hope you recognize that it's *natural and normal* for the period after Coming Home to be tough at times. While anticipating difficulties might sound counterproductive, scholars have found that people actually adapt more easily to re-entry when they expect it to have a mix of positive and negative aspects (as opposed to just assuming it will be easy). So what can you do with this knowledge?

First, think ahead about what you can do to set yourself up well for the journey after the journey. You might ask yourself:

What are some things I can do (or can ask for from others)
that will make my post-SAS transition easier?

Second, do your best to feel rather than ignore the challenging parts of re-entry. While it's natural for us, even unintentionally, to avoid feelings that may be painful, confusing, or overwhelming, doing so can keep us stuck in the long term. We encourage you to allow and accept your full experience.

I needed reassurance that it was okay to not have it all figured out immediately. (Staculty)

Maybe at the beginning there are struggles… But then it will find its place, sooner or later. (Staculty)

I think you have to be really kind to yourself... I also think the process after SAS was maybe not more changing than SAS itself, but I think it's beneficial to be clear with yourself about how you are choosing the consequences of everything you've done—how you process things and how you implement them. (Student)

BUILD IN BUFFER TIME

Many voyagers found it helpful to have some time in between the voyage and normal life (or their next new adventure). This doesn't need to look like spending extra time abroad, or having a cushy long break at home, which won't be accessible to everyone. Even a couple of days to decompress and adjust to time zone changes may help ease the transition back. Plan ahead.

How can you realistically build in some transition time?

I changed my return flight... That served as a bridge between the voyage and normal life. I spent time with SAS friends, which helped decompress. (Staculty)

I think the easiest way to re-enter is to have a buffer time between physically coming back and resuming your life as it was before… You don't want to leave the ship on a Saturday and start school or work again on Monday… You need time to consider, to decompress… to formulate your ideas and memories, and to reflect on what it all meant. (Staculty)

What I wanted to do after this voyage was extend my travel—to have some time to decompress before returning to my regular mode of operating. (Staculty)

Before I came back, I didn't come directly back from Thailand. A group of people I met on Semester at Sea — we became good friends and went to spend New Year's in Japan. So that was another amazing experience. (Student)



STAY IN TOUCH WITH SAS FRIENDS

The majority of the voyagers we interviewed spoke about how keeping in touch with fellow SASers was important in their post-SAS transitions. This feedback mirrors the consistent research finding that people returning from study abroad desire opportunities to connect and share with others who are interested and understand, such as their fellow study abroad returnees. In our interviews, some returned SAS voyagers described having daily contact with SAS friends. Some were planning future meetups or trips with fellow SASers. Some kept up with their SAS D&D (Dungeons & Dragons) gatherings virtually. Others were keeping in touch with people they met in port.

So stay in touch with your SAS people, especially in the initial re-entry phase. What matters isn't the quantity but the quality of those intentional connections. Having just one person who understands because they were there can make a huge difference. Expect that maintaining connection will require some effort on your part.

Schedule video calls. Send photos and videos to people. Text someone when you think of them, rather than trying to remember to do it later.

Being able to talk to people who had the same experience really helps because they know where you're coming from. (Student)

Because so much of Semester at Sea is about community, it's important to continue that community intentionally. (Staculty)



I've kept in close contact with my roommate and other SAS friends… that helps a lot. (Student)

What I would say is make sure you keep in contact with the people that you have been with. If you keep a good amount of connections with some of the people that you were on the ship with I think that's really helpful. And you can schedule things like get-togethers and stuff or Zoom calls and things like that. (Companion)



RE-ENGAGE IN YOUR LIFE AT HOME

Re-engaging in your life at home may keep you from becoming stuck in isolation, rumination, or longing for the voyage. For some, coming home also brings genuine relief: a return to comfort zones, familiar routines, and physical stability after months of movement.

Some voyagers told us how comforting it was to return to

pets **favorite foods** **spiritual communities**

familiar places **loved ones** **holiday rituals** **hobbies**

Others appreciated having more privacy again. For some, work or school also provided a stabilizing sense of structure and momentum. Returning to routines, goals, responsibilities, and everyday life sometimes helps voyagers begin integrating the experience into this next chapter. Even simple things like sleeping in their own bed, grocery shopping, or revisiting favorite places could feel anchoring.

Some voyagers realized they were more ready to come home than they had expected. For others, home became an important logistical and emotional base from which to start to envision and organize subsequent travel.

Let yourself re-engage with your life. Revisit the people, places, activities, and routines that genuinely nourish you. Amidst all that has changed, let yourself rediscover what still feels like home.

I was definitely ready to be back in my comfort zone —around familiar routines, Christmas music, and the holiday atmosphere. (Staculty)

Naming what I do have again has really helped me stay grounded... I focused on the things I missed while I was on the ship: Biking on my neighborhood trails, Gardening, Going to my farmer's market. (Staculty)

I've had such an amazing support system with my friends and family and my church. (Student)

After SAS… I was like, "Okay, now I need to make sure I get home to the last semester, make sure that I can graduate in time". (Student)

REMEMBER, REFLECT, AND PROCESS

Many voyagers shared how much it helped to actively keep their SAS memories alive after re-entry. This can look like reviewing your camera roll, rewatching videos, learning more about the places you visited on SAS, listening to the songs you listened to on SAS, looking at souvenirs, and wearing SAS merch. And even just old-fashioned reminiscing.

Additionally, several of those who we interviewed described returning home with many memories that they hadn't had enough time to fully sit with during SAS. Several interviewees expressed that they appreciated having more time to intentionally reflect on their experiences.

So take time to savor and spend time with your SAS memories. You might prefer to do this on your own, or with others. Remember that there's no "right way" to process your experiences, nor is there any deadline.

Having that experience and being able to talk to someone who asks me questions — it makes me think, recall, and have more in-depth conversations. It allows me to relive the moment a little bit, but also put it in a place where it won't make me feel sad every time I think about it. It's like putting it really nicely on a shelf to be admired, and then you can take it off once in a while to look through — but not from a place of regret or longing in a negative sense, if that makes sense. (Student)

What really helped was talking about it. Bringing it up in conversations, making connections between what I was doing now and what I learned or experienced abroad. (Student)

Something that helps is looking at those old videos and pictures — just proof that we were there, that we did do these experiences together. ... It does help me really place myself back in that feeling and that environment mentally. (Student)

I've been journaling — adding reflections and processing more deeply what the experience meant to me. It helps make the memories feel more complete. (Student)

I can listen to those Semester at Sea songs all the time, and I remember where I was, where I listened to them. (Staculty)



CREATE SOMETHING

Many voyagers gravitated toward creative outlets during re-entry. For some, it was a natural means through which to remember, reflect, and process. People shared about journaling, drawing, building a website, writing poems, making something out of their photos. This tracks with what we know about creative expression: it reduces stress, gives emotions a place to go, facilitates reflection and meaning-making, triggers positive feelings and flow states, and improves self-assurance.

If you feel so inclined, make something! Music, images, words, digital spaces. Let it be easy, and let it be imperfect. Share it with others, or don't.

I created a video compilation of the voyage—life on the ship and all 10 countries I visited. It was so good to process and remember everything that way. (Companion)

I write poems sometimes, and that helps me understand and express my feelings. (Student)

Creativity to me has been a way to pull myself out of the slump that I've been in. It's been so great to be either drawing or journaling and being able to share that with other people. (Student)

One idea for students or faculty returning home and struggling is to write things down—keep a diary or blog. Create something lasting with your pictures... treat it like a project. Have a specific plan for what you want to do. (Staculty)



LET YOUR IDENTITY EVOLVE

Many of the voyagers we interviewed told us they were changed in some way by SAS, even the people who'd sailed before, in both subtle and profound ways.

While some aspects of who we are remain consistent across time, identity is malleable and shaped by experience. It is normal to discover new things about oneself during *and following* an experience like SAS. This might include, for example, realizing that you are capable of more than you'd thought possible. It might also include realizing that some aspects of your life no longer fit the person you're becoming.

Importantly, identity shifts don't always feel clear, big, or immediate. More often, they're gradual.

Rather than rushing to define what SAS "meant" or how you've changed, it can be helpful to give yourself time and space to simply notice and be curious about what is unfolding.

If you would like to engage in intentional exploration of how SAS has influenced the person you are becoming, consider using the Reflection Questions list later on in this book.

I don't think it's ever truly over... SAS has changed me—
and continues to change me.
So yes, the voyage is over… but it's also not.
It's just taken on a different form in my life. (Staculty)

Semester At Sea expanded me. So, now I can sit in the most mundane of places... and I have these flashes of people we've met... or places we got to go... And the expansiveness of those examples are tenfold to what my life used to be. (Staculty)

After seeing so much of the world, the plans that I had for myself before Semester at Sea have drastically changed just because I know that I was limiting myself in my opportunities. I've seen so much and I understand that I can do so much now. (Student)



SEEK NOVELTY

One of the difficulties cited by our interview participants involved missing the constant exploration, spontaneous adventure, sensory newness (sights, sounds, tastes, etc.), and the buzzy feelings of possibility, the heightened sense of aliveness. Boredom, dissatisfaction, and restlessness are understandable following such an adventure.

While it's true that much of SAS is irreplicable, the feelings are not. How can you get back to that sense of novelty? Go to a new place, try a new food or activity, do something out of your comfort zone again. Bring your SAS mindset into daily life. Say "yes" to more things. Cate Brubaker, who has written extensively about re-entry after study abroad, suggests making what she calls an Adventure Passport: first, brainstorm what made you feel most "alive" while abroad. Then, make a list of all the things you want to experience while at home, including both old favorites plus new things that can spark the same feelings you most loved while abroad.

And I guess the most important thing, which wasn't intentional, was trying to approach every day and every small excursion as an opportunity for magic. Treating things as little adventures with a spirit of wonder and openness to being surprised. (Staculty)

My goal is to try something new every single day… Just constantly trying to say yes, because that's what I feel like Semester at Sea was about for me… And I think doing that will help you realize that you don't need to be on a ship or you don't need to be traveling to explore much of the world. You can be a tourist in your own city. (Staculty)



HAVE SOME GOALS

A number of voyagers spoke of the benefits of setting goals and taking steps toward them. Some described personal goals. Others used SAS as a foundation for new academic or career-related goals.

The fact that goal-setting was a stabilizing practice during voyagers' re-entry aligns with the literature: setting and working toward goals can provide direction and purpose, improve motivation and mood, reduce helplessness, and build hope that there are more good chapters ahead.

You might ask yourself,

What keeps pulling my attention?
What do I feel drawn towards?
What was that thing I wrote down in port that I wanted to look into?
What is the right next step for me?
Whose input, blessing, or encouragement matters to me?

Set some goals. Perhaps a mix of bigger long-term goals and bite-sized, more immediately-achievable goals. Once you know where you want to point your compass, start taking consistent steps (no matter how small!) in that direction.

I've started doing new challenges… meditation retreats, physical training. So, I've had to find ways to push myself in other ways. So I've started doing like even more Olympic weightlifting and CrossFit physically. (Staculty)



I started a daily tracker where I have seven things that I try to do every single day. (Student)

After SAS, I realized that my dream career path would be to work in diplomacy or government sectors. I didn't know that before SAS... SAS helped me with my career path... by giving me perspective. (Student)

Treat it like a project. Have a specific plan for what you want to do. For me, I wanted to stay connected through research... That kind of output keeps the experience alive. (Staculty)



KEEP TRAVELLING

Many voyagers expressed a desire and commitment to continue travelling. For some it meant signing up for another study abroad program, or planning a new international trip, or applying for internships abroad. For others it meant bringing a traveller's mindset to their local environment by being a tourist in their own city.

So keep feeding your traveller's spirit, even if another trip is not practically or financially accessible to you right now. You might create a travel bucket list or vision board, read travel essays or blogs, or research creative ways to work abroad or travel on a tight budget. Be open to how even places close to home can become exciting adventures.

Also, try to avoid thinking or saying that you'll never have as good an adventure again, or that you've "peaked" with SAS.

I signed up for another study abroad program this summer… so just finding ways to keep traveling… has really helped. (Student)

I'm even applying for a Red Cross internship in Central Africa. I wouldn't have had the courage to apply for an internship opportunity in Africa if not for Semester at Sea. (Student)

Think about how to revisit a country, or maybe return to SAS as a lifelong learner or faculty member in the future. (Companion)

I still look forward to the next time I board a plane to somewhere new. And I know most SASers probably feel the same way. (Student)

FIND NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE WITH SAS

Some voyagers were excited to stay involved with SAS in new ways after the voyage.

SAS has many avenues for continued involvement. You can remain a part of SAS, and SAS can remain a part of you, even long after your voyage. Consider becoming a Global Ambassador, Study Abroad Ambassador, or Diversity Peer Mentor. Join the SAS Alumni community and connect with those who have done SAS before for advice and wisdom. Consider representing SAS at study abroad fairs at your school, offering to give presentations on SAS to interested groups, or asking your favorite SAS professor if they have any projects you could contribute to.

I volunteer with Semester at Sea as a Diversity Peer Mentor and a Global Ambassador. I still talk with SAS staff and prospective students. It's a cool way to reflect on my voyage and keep the experience alive. Some prospective student questions make me revisit and reframe my own memories. (Student)



Since returning, I've really embraced sharing my story. I've: Given two presentations about my Semester at Sea experience; Been invited to be a guest speaker in [fellow staculty's] class... Accepted opportunities to lead a student group abroad… (Staculty)

My suggestion is: Join the SAS alumni community… stay involved. (Companion)

I've also gotten more involved with Semester at Sea after returning. I signed up to be a Global Ambassador and also became a Study Abroad Ambassador at my school. (Student)



IF THE POST-ABROAD BLUES DON'T GO AWAY

For many people, the ups and downs of returning home ease with time. However, if feelings like sadness, disconnection, anxiety, or apathy are persisting or starting to impact your sleep, relationships, work, or school, it may be a sign you need more support. Transitions can bring up a lot, and struggling is not a personal failure. It's okay to ask for help. Consider reaching out to a trusted friend or relative, fellow voyager, mentor, respected member of a community you belong to, or a mental health provider. You don't have to wait until things feel "bad enough." Getting support isn't a sign that something is wrong with you.

It's a way of taking care of yourself during a significant life transition.



Reflection Questions

We created a list of reflection questions for you that are drawn from several sources. The questions below are intended to help you slow down, stay curious, and reflect on your SAS experiences and the way the voyage may keep shaping your life long past disembarkation.

There is no right or wrong way to use these questions. You can return to the ones that resonate with you, at any time, and in any order. Answers may not come right away, and they might change as time goes on. You can respond to the questions in written words, or in a shared conversation with a friend, or through art, or by simply letting the questions exist in the background.

What are my most meaningful SAS memories?



What is my most happy / funny / scary / unexpected / proud / bizarre / moving memory from SAS?



When I look back on SAS, who are the people I will remember most?

Who were my greatest teachers on SAS?

What parts of my experience do I most want to share with my family? Friends?

Who in my life or community would be interested in hearing my SAS experiences?



What did I learn about myself on SAS?

What did I learn about what I like, need, or value?

What did I learn about how I manage change, uncertainty, and the unexpected?

What did I learn about how I adapt to new environments?



When did I feel most alive during SAS?

What will I carry forward from this experience into my everyday life?

What new perspectives or values might I want to weave into my life now?

What are some skills I learned?



What old habits/fears/beliefs do I now want to leave behind?

How might my priorities, or my vision for my life path, have changed?

What regrets did I leave SAS with?

What aspects of my identity feel more clear – or less! – since SAS?



When during SAS did I feel like I belonged? When did I feel like an outsider?

What did I learn about other countries and cultures on SAS?

What did I learn about The Blue World on SAS?

What did I learn that challenged some of my previous beliefs or assumptions?



What was my biggest cultural mistake or misstep during SAS?

When, where, and how did issues of privilege, or lack of privilege, come up for me during SAS?

How might I stay engaged with the broader world after SAS?

What life lessons from SAS might I want to share with others?



How can I integrate my new knowledge, interests and skills into my academic and/or professional life?

How can I make this experience relevant to my life now?

How can I take what I learned on the ship and make it into a new skill or mindset?

What skills did I acquire during SAS that I could include on a resume or highlight in a cover letter or interview? (Hint: Arcadia University's guide to Articulating Skills Learned Abroad may help you think of some!)



Since returning, what activities give me energy? What drains my energy?

In what ways have I changed since starting SAS? In what ways have I stayed the same?

In what ways might my loved ones have changed during SAS?



A Few Thoughts On The Benefits Of The Voyage

Travel exposes us to new experiences, it pushes us to stretch beyond our comfort zone and by default promotes personal growth and change. We consider new possibilities and learn new things about ourselves. Sometimes we learn that we like something we have never tried before, sometimes we learn that we have more perseverance, courage, (fill in the blank!) than we ever imagined. The list goes on. One voyager shared that no matter the voyage, "you still learn about yourself and that is never a waste of time." (Student)

Exposure to other cultures gives a "broader perspective on the human connection" (Companion) and invites us to revisit our thoughts and habits. There is much to learn from people, places and things that are different from one's own. One voyager commented, "The Vietnamese people don't dwell on the past or worry about the future. They live for today. That changed something in me." (Student)

Travel may challenge your values. Exposure to new ideas can force you to take a look in the mirror and "redefine what things mean to you." (Student). This can bring "core values to the surface" (Staculty) and prompt you to reexamine what is important to you and why. The voyage becomes a part of you. All the memories, experiences, the people you met are a part of you now. It becomes integrated into your beings, who you are, how you see others, how you view the world and life. "It's a long-term process of understanding and integrating the experience into your life." (Staculty)

Voyagers' Words Of Wisdom For Potential, Current, And Returned SAS Travelers

"I feel like I didn't really notice some of the things I loved the most because they seemed so normal to me. It's important to remember what you love about Semester at Sea before you go back."(Ship Kid)

"The experience will change you for the better." (Student)

"The experience is part of you now. Use it." (Companion)

"If you're going on the voyage, just say yes. I heard that before I went and really took it to heart... Just go with it. You won't regret it." (Student)

"Your outlook might be different now, and that's okay. Just redefine what things mean to you." (Student)

"When I look at what happened and what we did together, the courage arises and it makes it easier to walk through the fear, because fear is just fear. It doesn't really mean anything at all. It's just a state of mind. And you can just step through it and have the next adventure." (Staculty)



Conclusion

Coming home after SAS can feel both grounding and disorienting, reassuring and alienating, joyful and sad. We bring home not only physical souvenirs that we can see and touch and give away, but also emotional souvenirs: memories, perspectives, and inner shifts that cannot be seen, but can still be deeply felt.

Coming home also offers a powerful opportunity for reflection and personal growth. The experiences shared throughout this booklet remind us that re-entry is not simply the end of a voyage—it is the beginning of understanding how this global learning experience has shaped us and opens us to new opportunities.

We are deeply grateful to the 134 Voyagers who shared their honesty, wisdom, and encouragement to help guide fellow travelers through this transition. Their stories reflect the many ways people experience coming home. We hope this toolkit offers practical support and companionship as you continue your journey beyond Semester at Sea.

"The physical voyage ends but the journey keeps going." (Student)

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Biographies

Dee

Dee Colombini, Licensed Professional Counselor, Licensed Addiction Counselor is a Senior Staff Counselor at Colorado State University Health Network. She has also worked in schools, community mental health, and Drug Courts. She previously co-authored the chapter 'Juvenile Drug Courts' in Drug Courts: A New Approach to Treatment and Rehabilitation." She lives in Colorado with her family and mini-Aussie Maggie, where she enjoys the arts, the outdoors, and the adventure of travel. She especially loves the joy of roaming and discovering what awaits around every corner. Just follow your nose!

Kathleen

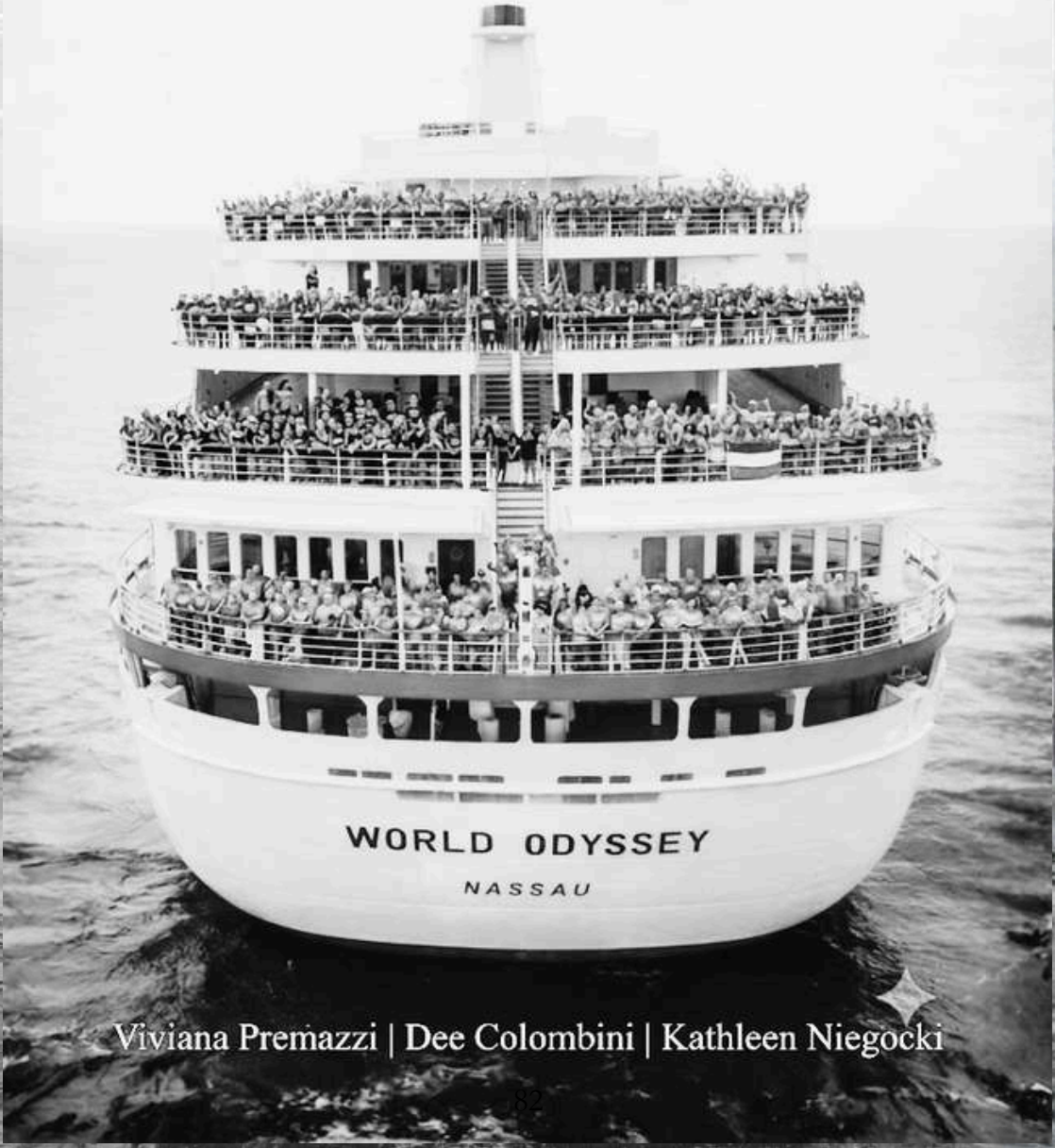
Kathleen Niegocki is a Licensed Counseling Psychologist in New York. She has worked in college and university counseling centers for more than 15 years. Since sailing on Voyage 134, Kathleen has split her time between private practice and — because she insists upon staying as sea-adjacent as possible! — the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. She lives on Long Island with her partner Brent and their two mini Aussies, Kodak and Maybellene. She dreams of one day sailing on another SAS voyage!

Viviana

As an Italian, Viviana Premazzi uses her hands to create the magic of connecting people across cultures. Officially, she is the founder of GMD – Global Mindset Development Training and Consultancy Services, an organization based on the beautiful island of Malta that promotes intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Her home is the world, and her heart is split between Italy, Malta, Brazil, and the US. Global Mindset Development is at the core of both her work and her mission in life. She loves singing and dancing, so that wherever she happens to be in the world, you may just find her performing in a karaoke bar.

COMING HOME

Life After Semester at Sea



Viviana Premazzi | Dee Colombini | Kathleen Niegocki