

Dalat Culture

There is no doubt that there is a distinct Dalat culture that is unique. Recognizing that it exists will go a long way in easing your transition. It is difficult to describe this sub-culture, but we'll try to mention a few of the tensions you may experience.



Dalat culture is sometimes described as living in a “fish bowl.” We live near each other, work together, often worship together, raise our kids together. We get together socially, go on vacations together, and even make plans to see each other “back home.” We have intimate relationships and you may find some of your deepest, dearest friends during your ministry here. However, we often step on each other’s toes. It’s easy to jump to conclusions and make assumptions about one another. After all, we spend quite a lot of time together. You can offset the tension by trying to think the best of others’ intentions and attribute positive motives. Extend grace as much as possible. Since it’s easy to be ingrown, try to branch out. Learn some of the language, meet your neighbors and local families, and befriend day families in the expatriate community.

Dalat culture is built on years of wonderful traditions. These traditions are important to the life of the school and the connectedness people feel. You will find passionate loyalties to a precious history. You will soon see that some events are very special and handled in a special way. There are many oral traditions and expectations. These traditions impart a special flavor that has endeared the school to so many over the years. However, at times you may find these customs to be stifling. You may experience frustration in expressing new ideas. You may hear, “oh, you can’t do that here” or “we tried that already and it didn’t work.” Don’t give up. Present your new ideas with thoughtfulness. Your gentle, non-judgmental way will be more easily accepted. There already is an increasing enthusiasm for new ideas and we’ve had some recent paradigm shifts that are truly exciting.

It takes time to adjust to the Dalat culture. In addition to moving across the world, you will be adjusting to a new country, new city, new climate, new school, new jobs, new home, new friends, and new cultures. Expect this transition to take a year or more. The ride will be bumpy and there may be days you question your wisdom in accepting this ministry! The experience itself is valuable. God teaches us through the process. As a new dorm dad mentioned in our New Staff Debriefing, “it’s the journey that’s important.”

As you’re experiencing the tensions inherent in this transition, try to hold on to family routines and traditions as much as possible. It’s difficult to do so when you first arrive, but try to put them in place as quickly as you can. It will help distinguish your family as a unit and give you some sense of normalcy in a time of upheaval. Holiday routines are also important. You’ll realize that you may not be able to duplicate them in the exact manner as back home. You may not be able to find certain recipe ingredients or decorations that you’re accustomed to. There is no doubt that you’ll have to make some adjustments, but try not to abandon your traditions all together. They’re what make your family special and give you continuity no matter where in the world you move. The fun is that you’ll pick up new traditions that will continue to reflect your “multi-culture-ness” for years to come.

People have different perceptions on fitting in to Dalat culture. Some find it to be embracing, warm and friendly. Others feel the struggles and disappointments more intensely. No one can tell you how you’ll feel. But do talk to someone. Have a faithful e-mail partner back home who is willing to let you share your heart and who can be a little more

objective as you experience ups and downs. You may want to find an accountability partner here who will allow you to express your joys and frustrations. Most of all, maintain a vital relationship with the Lord. Our busyness can threaten to rob us of prayer time just when we need it most!

Finally, we come from different countries, different church backgrounds, and vary on our philosophies of education. We make different decisions in raising our families, how we spend our resources and leisure time, and even see the school through different eyes. We struggle with understanding ourselves and wrestle with questions like “are you a missionary?” It is an intense, energy-demanding, wonderfully rewarding ministry. The Dalat culture is much more than what’s printed on this page, but if we tell you too much, we’ll risk coloring your perspective and you’ll miss out on the joy of discovering it for yourself!