

Chatterbox # 21 – Tips on studying abroad by Rita D'Amico

Transcript

Harp: Hello everyone, this is Harp.

Rita: And my name is Rita.

Harp: Yes, I have Rita here with me and we're going to do a Chatterbox episode. The Chatterbox episode is where we interview people or we talk about interesting topics and in this one we're going to do both, which is great. Make sure you check out the website, that's C-U-L-I-P-S.com because there you can find the Lipservice and in the Lipservice you can find the transcripts, the detailed explanations and even a quiz. So Rita, can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

Rita: Sure, my name is Rita. I was born and raised in Montreal, Quebec. I taught English for 3 years and I've also worked in administration, **home stay** and activities at a language school for 3 more years, so 6 years in total.

Harp: OK, perfect. Now you might be asking yourself, why are we interviewing Rita? Well, other than she's a fantastic person, she also has great advice for all you Culips listeners who are interested in living abroad and travelling and learning languages in different places. If you want to know more about Rita there is another Chatterbox interview with her so please find it on Culips. So Rita, **what are you up to these days?**

Rita: Well, these days, I started my own company, it's called ***On Your Mark Montreal*** and what I do is offer services to students that are coming to Montreal. So I can offer them a variety of services in regards to working, living or studying in Montreal.

Harp: OK perfect. What kind of services?

Rita: I like to think of *On Your Mark Montreal* as a **one-stop shop**. I can answer almost any question you have about living, working or studying in Montreal.

Harp: Perfect, and what's your website?

Rita: My website is www.onyourmarkmontreal.com.

Harp: Perfect. And we'll put a link to Rita's website on Culips so you can find it easily.

Rita: Excellent.

Harp: Now Rita, with all of your experience in the English and ESL world can you give us some tips on choosing a location or city to live and study in Canada?

Rita: Sure, I'd be happy to do that. First thing is to find the city you want to live in. In order to do that, well, you need to do some research. There are three major cities in Canada. We have Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal. And each of them has their unique personality. For example, Vancouver ... Vancouver's a wonderful city. If you like nature and a very relaxed or easy, laid back atmosphere, Vancouver would be the place for you. With the ocean on one side and the mountains on the other it makes a very scenic and beautiful city to visit and live in. You have to **keep in mind** that Vancouver has a large Asian population so if you are from Japan, Korea or China, you might not have that much time to practice your English language skills. As well Vancouver is probably one of the most expensive cities to live in, in Canada. But it's beautiful, definitely. And if you like the **hustle and bustle** of large cities, Toronto might be for you. Toronto is the largest city in Canada. It also has the largest multicultural community in Canada as well. It is the business centre so things move quickly, people talk quickly in Toronto. And then my favourite of course, I'm a little bit **biased**, would be Montreal. If you are interested in arts and language, because, remember, Montreal is bilingual so you can get French and English here. Montreal has a unique history. It shares its history with French and English. So I think it's the best city here but again I'm a little bit **biased**. As well Montreal is one of the least expensive cities to live in compared to Toronto and Vancouver.

Harp: OK, so it's important for students to kind of decide their priorities when choosing the city.

Rita: Absolutely, you should definitely do some research about cost of living in each of the cities, you can find all of this information online as well. So look at things like taxes and accommodation, rent, you know how much does rent, the average rent cost as well. And of course you should always check out safety. How safe is the city you want to live in? And check out the different neighbourhoods as well.

Harp: So Rita, can you give us some advice on choosing a language school?

Rita: Sure, ironically, again, you have to do your homework, when you're looking at a school you should always check out the credentials of the staff. Are the teachers certified? Do they have international experience in teaching languages? Have they lived abroad or are they native speakers of the language? And how long have they been teaching? As well, check out class

size. You don't really want to be in a class where there are 16 to 18 other people. Teachers don't really have the time to focus on anything that you might need some help with. So a good class size would be between 6 to 8 students. As well, the teaching resources ... do they have a library, do they have movies and books for you to use, so that you can practice outside of the classroom?

Harp: OK, that's great advice.

Rita: Location. You definitely want to find a school that is sort of in the centre of the city so that it's easy for you to get to. You don't want to waste everyday travelling you know one or two hours a day, so definitely location is important. And options - language schools are changing. There are more and more schools that offer language courses mixed with other activities. So for example, you can take an art class that's also an ESL class so they will teach you the language of art as well as how to make art.

Harp: Oh OK, that's interesting.

Rita: It's a lot of information to deal with. A good language school agent can help you sort all of the information out. A good agent will ask you what your expectations are and if you have a particular reason for studying abroad. With that information they can help you **narrow down** your choices and you can find a good agent. How do you find a good agent? Ask your friends or family that have travelled before. They're always a good source of information and my best advice is to find a language agent that's actually in the city you're going to live in. It's a good idea to have someone there that can help you and give you immediate support.

Harp: Now Rita, can you give us some tips on how to succeed while studying abroad?

Rita: Sure of course, of course. Get ready for a little bit of **culture shock**. It's normal to be a little bit **overwhelmed** when you first arrive in a city and everything is different and it's not like back home. So yeah, you're going to probably have a little bit of **culture shock**. Some good advice I can give you is to remember there is no perfect city, including your own, so it takes a little patience and an open-minded attitude. Ways to get over **culture shock**: make friends. It's probably the best advice I can give you. And you can do that by joining after-school activities. If it's a good school they'll probably have some planned activities after school. I would also recommend joining a language exchange group. There's a few reasons for that. One is it's free, so that's nice you don't have to spend any money, and you get to meet people that are interested in your culture as well. That's why it's an exchange so and

it's a good way to make friends. And if you have a hobby or a sport, find a community centre where you can go and practice that sport or hobby, and again, you're **bound to** meet other people who are also enjoying the same things that you do. And definitely be patient with yourself. It's OK to feel sad; it's OK to miss your friends and family in the first few weeks that you're here. Don't go running back right away. With a little bit of time and a good attitude you will start to feel like this is your new home.

Harp: I agree with you Rita, having a good attitude is so important and it's going to be the best tool that someone has when they come to a new culture. It was the same thing when I went to live in Korea. I had to have a good attitude or else I wouldn't have survived the **culture shock**. Wow, Rita that was excellent advice.

Rita: Thank you, thank you.

Harp: So that's about it for today.

Rita: Yeah.

Harp: That was wonderful. I think that people out there are really going to appreciate your wonderful advice.

Rita: You know it's a new adventure and things can always seem a little bit scary but with a little bit of help from friends and family and a little bit of patience and a good attitude, it can be an adventure of a lifetime, something you will never forget.

Harp: Well Rita thank you for joining us.

Rita: My pleasure.

Harp: So make sure you check out the website where you can find the Lipservice. That's about it for us today. Bye everyone.

Rita: Bye.

Detailed Explanation

Home stay

Do you know what a **home stay** is? A **home stay** is when someone goes to another country and stays with a local family. This is usually done to learn the language and to experience the culture more closely. It can also be helpful for having support from the family. Some people's experiences are not so ideal. Other people have the most wonderful experiences during a home stay. It is called a home stay because you **stay** at someone's **home**.



What are you up to these days?

Harp asks Rita this question at the beginning of this episode. She says, "**what are you up to these days?**" **What are you up to** is simply another way of asking what the person has been doing lately. There are lots of ways of meeting someone and asking what is new with them.

Harp also says, "**these days.**" **These days** means now or lately. So the question **what have you been up to these days?** means exactly the same thing as *what have you been doing lately*.

On your mark

The name of Rita's business is On Your Mark Montreal. But **on your mark** is also an expression, and that is why Rita uses it in her business name. **On your mark** is said at the beginning of a running race. An announcer says, "**on your mark**, get set, go!" You may also hear, "ready, set, go!"

On your mark instructs the racer to get on their mark or place. Then *get set* tells the racer to get into the starting position. And then *go* means that the race has begun!

In the case of Rita's On Your Mark Montreal, it is like the beginning of your adventure toward Montreal. People say **on your mark** in other contexts sometimes, simply to mean get ready because something is about to begin.

One-stop shop

A **one-stop shop** is a place where you can everything you need. Imagine that you are shopping and need to buy a variety of things and so would need to go to a lot of different stores. Then imagine a shop where you only need to stop once because they have everything you need. Well, that is a **one-stop shop**!

Rita talks about On Your Mark Montreal as a **one-stop shop**. In this case it is not literally a shop. Her company provides all you need for coming to live and study English in Montreal and so in a sense it is one place for everything.

Keep in mind

To **keep something in mind** means to remember and/or to consider it. It really means to keep something in your mind. **Keep in mind** is usually used when you are giving someone advice or instructions on what to do.

Here are some examples with **to keep in mind**.

Gordon: Is there anything else I need to know about completing this report?

Elaine: Please **keep in mind** that it can be no longer than 10 pages.

Paul: **Keep in mind** that we will also be leaving really early tomorrow.

Jade: That probably means we should go to bed early too.

Braden: Remember to bring hats and mittens when you go to Canada.

Irene: It's a good idea to **keep that in mind** when you are packing your bags.

Hustle and bustle

Oh, the **hustle and bustle** of a big city! **Hustle and bustle** describes a place with a lot of action and a lot of noise. In this expression hustle and bustle go together always but they are words on their own too. **Hustle** means to move quickly with lots of energy. **Bustle** also means to move with a lot of energy, often noisily.

In a big city, such as Toronto, there is a lot of energy and a lot of movement, and a lot of noise. That is the **hustle and bustle** of the big city.

*Note that we do not say *bustle and hustle*. **Hustle** must come first. We don't have a good reason. It just sounds more natural!

Biased

When Rita is talking about Montreal she mentions being **biased** a couple of times. What is she talking about? *To have a bias* or *to be biased* means that you already have a certain opinion that prevents you from being unprejudiced. Rita says that Montreal is her favourite city and that she is **biased**. She is **biased** when talking about favourite cities in Canada because she is from Montreal, so of course she has a preference for Montreal.



Here are a couple more examples when someone is biased.

Wanda: Which pie do you think was the best?

Sheila: I think the cherry pie was the best, but I am a little **biased**. My mother made the cherry pie!

Whitney: Who do you think will win the Stanley Cup?

Paul: I think the Detroit Red Wings will win!

Whitney: That's not being realistic. You're **biased** because it's your favourite team.

Narrow down

To narrow down means that something is more focused or defined more clearly. Just like in this episode, people often **narrow down** many choices or options. So if you have 8 options, you can **narrow it down** to 4 options. It's like you have a wide choice, but you want less choice.

Here are a couple examples with **narrow down**.

Gena: I am not sure what I am going to do next year when I am finished school.

Louise: Well, what are your options?

Gena: I don't know. There are so many!

Louise: OK, let's start by **narrowing** them **down**.

Brad: What are you studying at university?

Amber: History.

Brad: What are you going to specialize in?

Amber: I am not sure. I will **narrow it down** soon.

You can **narrow** something **down** or you can **narrow down** something. With many two-word verbs there is often an option of keeping the words together (**narrow down** the options) and putting the direct object in between (**narrow** the options **down**). Often a pronoun sounds strange if it is not placed between the two-word verb. Let's look at the examples above again.

GOOD

Gena: I don't know. There are so many!

Louise: OK, let's start by **narrowing** them **down**.

Gena: I don't know. There are so many!

Louise: OK, let's start by **narrowing** your options **down**.

NOT GOOD

Gena: I don't know. There are so many!

Louise: OK, let's start by **narrowing down** them.

Culture Shock

If you have travelled to an English speaking country, or currently live in one, and are from another part of the world, you probably know culture shock very well! It is the experience of feeling very strange in a new culture different from your own. It is the shock from a new culture. In one of our very first episodes at Culips we talked about culture shock. Have you heard this episode?

Overwhelmed

Rita says that when you first arrive in a new country it is normal to feel **overwhelmed**. To feel or to be **overwhelmed** means that you feel overpowered or overcome. Some thing, idea or situation demands all your attention and it can be very tiring.

One experience that people can find **overwhelming** is starting university. You have new classes and you have to meet a lot of new people. You will have to find your way around campus and you will also have to study hard. There are so many things to learn when you start university that many people find it **overwhelming**. In the same way, starting a new job can be **overwhelming**.

Things can also be **overwhelming** in a good or positive way. If someone has a surprise party for you and all your friends are there, then you might feel **overwhelmed**. You feel overwhelmed because you feel so many strong feelings at the same time, like embarrassment and happiness.

Overwhelm can be an adjective or a verb. But someone cannot be *whelmed*. *Whelm* is a verb, but never an adjective and not used very often. Sometimes you may hear people say *underwhelm*. This is not a real word but started as a slang term that is now generally understood as the opposite of **overwhelm**. If you don't feel anything at all in a given situation, you can say you were underwhelmed!

Bound

You are **bound** to meet new friends after arriving in a new place. If something is **bound** to happen it means that something is sure or likely to happen. For example, if you have pale skin, don't wear sunscreen, and lie out in the sun all day, you are **bound** to get a sun burn. Or if you don't study for your exams, you are **bound** to fail.

Here are some examples with **bound**.

Sara: I haven't found a job yet. I am getting worried.

Leo: Don't worry, with your experience you are **bound** to find something.

Jeff: I can't find Sean anywhere. I don't know where he is.

Max: I saw him a few minutes ago. He is **bound** to be around here somewhere.

Natural English that makes no grammatical sense

Rita says "If you are interested in arts and language, because, remember, Montreal is bilingual so you can get French and English here."

This sentence does not make grammatical sense but is an excellent example of something that native speakers from any culture do all the time: they change their sentence halfway through. Here are two different sentences that make up Rita's one sentence. Notice the words that are the same between Rita's sentence and the others.

Rita says, "If you are interested in arts and language, because, remember, Montreal is bilingual so you can get French and English here."

"If you are interested in arts and language then Montreal is a good place for you because it is bilingual, so you can get French and English here."

OR

"Remember, Montreal is bilingual so you can get French and English here."

Quiz

1. What does Harp ask Rita at the beginning of this episode that has the same meaning as *what have you been doing lately?*

- a) How are you now?
- b) What are you up to these days?
- c) What are you doing?
- d) What is your name?

2. Which expression is often followed by "...get set, go"?

- a) on your mark
- b) ready steady
- c) marks
- d) mark up

3. Iris: I have so many things I need to go buy. I will probably spend the whole day running around.

Anna: You should go to Tim's place because it has everything.

It's a _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) lucky pot
- b) one-stop shop
- c) shopper's paradise
- d) party place

4. When learning another language, please _____ that you are going to make mistakes!

Please fill in the blank.

- a) mind
- b) keep in mind
- c) keep it up
- d) keep

5. In any big city there is a lot of _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) hurry
- b) bumping
- c) hustle and bustle
- d) bustle and bustle

6. Rita says that her favourite city in Canada is Montreal. This is not an objective opinion. Rita actually lives in Montreal, so she is _____.

Please fill in the blank.

- a) bonkers
- b) busy
- c) busted
- d) biased

7. If you have a lot of choices, you might want to have fewer choices. What is this called?

- a) widening the gap
- b) wide-eyed
- c) narrowing it in
- d) narrowing down

8. What do many people feel when they begin a new job, meet lots of new people and have lots of new responsibilities?

- a) overwhelmed
- b) underwhelmed
- c) whelmed
- d) overcooked

Answers: 1.b 2.a 3.b 4.b 5.c 6.d 7. d 8. a