

world citizens guide

Practical advice for Americans traveling abroad



If your travels take you outside the United States, this primer on “world citizenship” may be helpful.

For years, many people in the world have had a great fondness for America. They have admired our culture, our products and our cheerful, fun-loving nature. In recent years,

however, there has been a significant shift in those feelings. Research studies show that, for a number of reasons, “favorability” ratings for America are declining around the world.

While it is true that the rise in negative feelings toward us may result from perceptions more than reality, it is also true that perceptions are powerful opinion makers. You, and the 55-60 million other Americans

who travel abroad each year, have a unique opportunity to change at least some impressions of us from negative to positive. By following the few simple suggestions in this guide, you can have a better travel experience while showing America’s best face to those you visit.

We’ve added side notes of a few interesting facts about different countries and cultures. If you want to read more, visit the World Citizens Guide site for additional travel information and resources.
worldcitizensguide.org



25 simple suggestions



Look. Listen. Learn. New places mean new cultures and new experiences. Don’t just shop. See the sights, hear the sounds and try to understand the lives people live.

Smile. Genuinely. It’s a universal equalizer.

Think big. Act small. Be humble.

In many countries, boasting is considered very rude. It’s easy to resent big, powerful people. Assume resentment as a default and play down your wealth, power and status. When Americans



In 2003, over 7,300,667 U.S. passports were issued.

meet each other for the first time, our job (and implied status) is a key part of “who” we are, and how we introduce ourselves. This is less important elsewhere, and can be perceived as braggadocio.

Live, eat and play local. Once you get to know other Americans, don’t start ignoring locals you knew before. Most people believe that Americans have the most fun when they are in their own company. Prove them wrong. The world is full of interesting and exciting things, people and places you might never have heard of. Take some of it in.

In Japan, it is considered rude to look at a person directly in the eye for more than a few seconds.



Be patient. We talk fast. Eat fast. Move fast. Live fast. Many cultures do not. In fact, time is understood very differently around the world. In the short term, speed and instant satisfaction are less important than enjoying a new culture.

Celebrate our diversity. We are a giant patchwork of many cultures, and not the singular people others envision. Find a way to share that.

Become a student again. Everybody abroad may not be aware of occurrences that are obvious for you (movies, music, baseball, Super Bowl winners, etc.) Try to find a few topics that are most important in the local popular culture.

Try the language.

Try to speak some of the language even if the only thing you can say is “Hello.” And “Thank you.” It’s okay to sound like a child. Making the effort is more endearing than off putting.

Refrain from lecturing.

Whether on pollution, energy usage or the environment, it’s not a polite stance. Nobody likes a know-it-all, and nobody likes a whole nation of them. Rightly or wrongly the U.S. is seen as appointing itself as policeman, judge and jury to the world. Be aware of this perception and try to understand other viewpoints.

Dialogue instead of monologue.

When you’re talking about the U.S. and your life there, ask people you’re visiting how what you’ve said compares to what they do and how they live in their country.

Mandarin, English, Hindi, Spanish, Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese and Russian. If you can say hello in these languages, you can greet over half the people in the world.



In most European countries, the correct way to wave hello and good-bye is palm out, hand and arm stationary, fingers wagging up and down. Common American waving means no—except in Greece, where it is an insult.

Use your hands. Watch your feet.

Gestures are a powerful language in any culture. Gestures are easier to learn than a language. Study up on them. Combine a basic knowledge of gestures with some very basic language to help you communicate better and more quickly.

Leave the clichés at home.

Our clichés often don’t mean much or maybe anything to people of other cultures and they are difficult to translate.

Be proud, not arrogant. People around the world are fascinated by the U.S. and the lives we Americans live. They admire our openness, our optimism, our creativity and our “can-do” spirit. But that doesn’t mean they feel less proud of their country and culture. Be proud of being an American, but resist any temptation to present our way as the best way or the only way.

Keep religion private. Globally speaking, religion is not something you wear on your sleeve. Often it is considered deeply personal -- not public. Some may have no knowledge of the Bible, nor is it appropriate to tell them about it unless you are a professional missionary identified as such.

Be quiet. Less is more. In conversation match your voice level to the environment and other speakers. A loud voice is often perceived as a bragging voice. Casual profanity is almost always considered unacceptable.

Check the atlas. You may not believe anyone could confuse “Australia” with “Austria,” but it happens. Everyone’s home is important to them. It’s helpful if you familiarize yourself with local geography.



In Norway, 40% of the Parliament and almost half of the cabinet positions are filled by women.

Talk about something besides politics. Make yourself aware of the political environment of the region but don’t offer a view if you don’t have to. If pushed, ask the people with whom you’re having a conversation what their thoughts are. Listen first. Then speak. And leave politics alone if you can. Speak of culture, art, food or family if you need another topic.

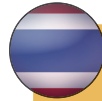
Be safety conscious, not fearful. If you went to certain parts of any city in the U.S., you’d watch your wallet and make sure you had your wits about you. So why should it be any different anywhere else?

Dress for respect. Americans are fundamentally a casual people. Jeans, T-shirts and sneakers work for many of us much of the time, but there are people in other countries that believe

Agree to disagree respectfully.

Surely, there are people who object to actions or activities of our government, our industries and our culture. Not every objection is the same. Listen politely. Then respond appropriately.

In Lebanon, people do not ask about someone’s religion because that would mean they are categorizing someone.



In Thailand, it is actually illegal to leave the country with an image of Buddha.

such casualness is a sign of disrespect to them and their beliefs. Check out what is expected and bring scarves, headwear or whatever might be required.

Know some global sports trivia.

Many countries don’t play or watch American sports. So avoid filling your conversations with U.S. sporting allusions. There’s a good chance people will not understand.

Keep your word. If you say that you will e-mail, find that book or baseball cap and send it, then make sure that you keep your promises.

Show your best side. Americans are a kind and generous people. You can help dispel the stereotype of the Ugly American; impress people with your kindness, curiosity and fair nature.

Be a traveler, not a tourist. Before you touch down in another country, learn as much as you can about it. Go beyond the guidebooks and pick up some of the music and the literature of the land. If you can, rent some movies from that country. Go online and search for information about the places you want to visit. You can get a great start through the resources we’ve put together at the World Citizens Guide website.

worldcitizensguide.org

Have a wonderful trip! Make new friends. Bring back the best of the world and leave a little of the best of yourself wherever you go. Share this *World Citizens Guide* with a friend.

There are at least 300 languages spoken in India.



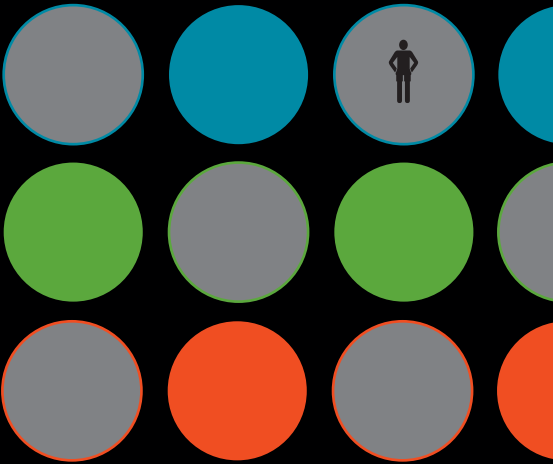
You are a citizen of a very diverse world.

If we shrank the earth's population to a "global village" of only 100 people and kept all the existing human ratios, there'd be:

- 61** from Asia
- 21** from China
- 17** from India
- 13** from Africa
- 12** from Europe
- 5** from the U.S.
- 1** from Australia and New Zealand
- 22** who speak a Chinese dialect,
18 of whom speak Mandarin
- 9** who speak English
- 8** who speak Hindi
- 50** females
- 50** males
- 32** Christians
- 68** non-Christians,
15 of whom are nonreligious
- 19** Muslims
- 6** Buddhists
- 1** Jew
- 30** who have enough to eat
- 88** old enough to read,
17 of whom cannot read at all
- 1** teacher

and you are one person traveling that world.





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