

3-8 Months Prior to Trip

Culture Quest

What makes one country different from another? What distinguishes one group of people from another beyond geography, language, and food? Culture!

Culture is defined as a shared set of values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors widely held by members of the same group or community. But wait, culture is much more than meets the eye, literally. Certain features of cultures are visible (foods and clothing) but some aspects are not so easy to see (values, importance of family, etc.).



Visible Features of Culture

- Styles of dress
- Ways of greeting people
- Paintings, sculpture, and other art
- Literature
- Facial expressions and hand gestures
- Holiday customs
- Music
- Dance
- Celebrations
- Foods
- Greetings
- Religious rituals

Invisible Features of Culture

- Beliefs about hospitality
- Importance of time
- Values
- Childrearing practices (children and teens)
- Attitudes about personal space/privacy
- Responsibilities of children and teens
- Concepts of fairness
- Nature of friendship
- Ideas about clothing
- Concept of self
- Work ethic
- Religious beliefs
- Concepts of beauty
- Rules of polite behavior
- Attitudes toward age
- Role of family
- General world view

Ways to Learn About the Culture of a Country

- Explore Web sites and visit the library for books, magazines, newspapers, movies, and travel DVDs.
- Contact your council to see if other girls or adults who have visited your destination would be willing to talk to you.
- Find cultural, civic, or exchange organizations that offer information.
- Contact chambers of commerce or travel agencies willing to provide resources.
- Don't leave out your friends and family. Your aunt may have never been to Costa Rica, but maybe her friend has.

Progress

18-24
Months

12-16
Months

8-12
Months

**3-8
Months**

6-8
Weeks

4-6
Weeks

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Your Own Culture

Before you “cross” into another culture, think about the culture that defines you. Look at the questions below then write your responses in your Girl Scout Travel Log.

What languages do you speak?

What music do you listen to? What dances do you know?

What foods do you eat at home?

In your family, what is considered polite and what is considered rude? What manners have you been taught? (Think about such things as table manners, behavior toward guests in your home, what to say when answering the telephone, how to say thank you for a meal.)

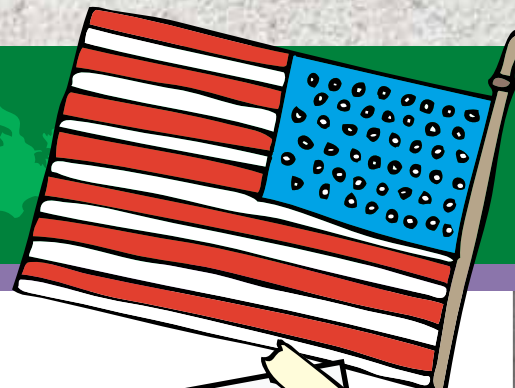
What do you wear on special occasions? What do you wear every day?

How often do you see your extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins)? What role do they play in your life?

What holidays and ceremonies are important in your family?

Describe something you value: it could be an aspect of behavior like respect or honesty. It could be a person such as a mother, father, brother, sister, or friend. It could be a goal, such as going to college or designing a Web site. What do you like to do?

Based on your answers, how would you describe your culture?



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Crossing Cultures

The more you know about the culture you'll be visiting, the less likely you'll make a cultural faux pas. Could shaking someone's hand, drinking milk, or sitting down cause a cultural misunderstanding? It depends on where you are.

Check out these stories of girls who traveled abroad. What would you do?

Akina's Kisses

Although France is known for amour, Akina didn't expect kisses every time she met someone. When she traveled to Paris and put out her hand to shake, she was in for a surprise. On more than one occasion, the Parisians she'd met pulled her in and kissed her on both cheeks. Her new friends' expressions of greeting were a little unsettling at first, but with time Akina grew to appreciate their warmth.

Susana's Shoes

Susana welcomed her Indian host mom's invitation to have a seat after a long day of exploring the city. She sat down in a chair, threw up her legs, and kicked back. Her host mother's reacted in horror. Little did Susana know it was an insult to let the bottom of her feet (or shoes) face someone because that is considered the dirtiest part of the body.

Kate's Cereal

After a long journey and a restless night's sleep, Kate couldn't wait for breakfast at her German host family's house. "Perfect. They have cereal. Just like in the USA.", Or so she thought. After

the first spoonful she realized the milk was warm. Her host family explained that cold beverages are not good for your health. Warm milk with cereal isn't so bad after all, Kate realized.

Annie's Flowers

Annie was excited to present a bouquet of flowers to her new Senegalese friends. However, instead of looking happy, they looked a bit insulted. Annie didn't realize that it's considered "unclean" to use your left hand for such things as eating, paying the bill, shaking hands, and presenting gifts. From then on, Annie made sure to use her right hand.

What would you do if you were in these situations? Avoid cultural pitfalls by doing your homework and finding out about cultural practices. It also helps to be aware of your surroundings. How are people reacting to you? Take visual cues from the locals. If someone is reacting to you strangely, stop and think about what you're doing!



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You Could Be in for a SHOCK!

Culture shock is more common than you realize. It doesn't matter how short or long a trip is; everyone experiences some culture shock. That doesn't mean you are destined to spend the entire time in your room freaking out. Everyone handles culture shock in different ways and just as quickly as it comes, it may go. Your best defense is to understand what culture shock is and use the "Ward Off Culture Shock" tips listed here.



1. You start off with over-the-top happiness or feeling totally excited about a new culture. Everything is new and you can't wait to explore.



2. Then, a feeling of nervousness or stress about being in an unfamiliar place may start to set in. You may feel homesick. It's perfectly natural to be a little anxious by new surroundings or like "I just don't fit in here."



3. Negativity is often the next phase. You may make judgments: things not only feel different, but wrong. But, remember, it's not up to us to decide what is good or bad in other cultures.



4. Finally, things start to come together and you adjust to your surroundings. Maybe you don't love everything, but now you can see the positive.

Ward Off Culture Shock

Be open minded and receptive.

Find humor. When does laughing not make you feel better?

Be flexible. It's not the end of the world if things don't go exactly as planned.

Communicate your feelings and concerns. Talking it out always helps and lets others know what's going on with you.

Accept that things may be unclear. Don't judge because you don't understand.

Have positive, realistic expectations about where you're going and what you'll be doing.

Express warmth, empathy, and respect for others.

Ask questions. If someone responds to what you say or do in an unexpected way, inquire about that response. It can lead to an opportunity for cultural exchange.

checkpoint

3-8 Months

Try to immerse yourself in the culture as fully as possible.

— Brenna, 17

Really get to know where you are going before you get there; it will mean more when you get there.

— Anna, 18

Since coming back from my trip, I realized I shouldn't judge people before really getting to know them.

— Patrice, 13

- Spend time with a person or group who are part of a culture different than yours. Think of it as life practice for your trip. Analyze your experience. What went well? What did you learn? What surprised you? What didn't go so well? Think about how you may have contributed to the positive or awkward moments. How can you apply what you learned to your upcoming trip?
- Create a "language card" with common words and phrases to carry on your trip.

Ciao

Bonjour

Hola

Adios



Checklist

Before you move on to the next phase of planning your international trip, did you:

- Investigate the visible and invisible features that make up a culture?
- Define characteristics that make up your own culture?
- Explore the culture you'll be visiting inside and out?
- Get familiar with the stages of culture shock?
- Submit an Intent to Travel form to GSUSA? (See Appendix)
- Make airline and lodging reservations?

Notes & Ideas

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