

## 5 Steps to Thinking Local

### 1. Be willing to re-think your sense of personal space.

The U.S. is a really big country. There's a lot of space: space in between people, houses, and cities. But that's not the way people live in many other parts of the world. During your experience abroad you'll be forced to reconsider how much space you really need around your body in order to feel comfortable. Or, put another way, you'll have to get used to being much closer to people than you're probably used to.

### 2. Prepare for a different level of body contact than what you're used to.

So here's something you'll probably realize very soon into your experience abroad that you might not have noticed before: the U.S. is a pretty low-contact society. Sure, we shake hands and family members will merit hugs or kisses but besides that not too much else.

If you're traveling to Latin America or Southern Europe, you'll be surprised by the amount of body contact involved in normal interactions and everyday communication. Hopefully you won't consider it offensive for someone you might not know that well to throw their arms around your shoulder, kiss you on the cheek, or give you a well intentioned hair-tussle. Don't worry though; it's something you'll get used to, and once you do, you'll see the charm and warmth of it.

To be fair, some cultures engage in less body contact than we do in the States. You'll notice this if you're planning on studying abroad in places like Northern Europe or Japan. This may be harder to cope with, since more body contact means more friendliness; less of it than you're used to might initially make you feel distant and isolated from others.

### 3. Think local, not tourist.

So here you are in uncharted territory. Everything's exciting and new. You're your own master living your own adventure and you're loving it. And you should, you definitely should, but you should also be able to keep a level head about you and exercise good judgment. No matter where you go there will always be people who thrive on the gullibility and inexperience of foreigners. Bar owners who jack up their prices if you look like a tourist, taxi drivers who suddenly aren't familiar with the area and literally take you for a ride, or, worse, smiling 'tour guides' that'll take you through the city's most beautiful alleys and only charge you your wallet.

. It's nothing to be afraid of as long as you're aware that not everybody in the world is looking out for your best interests. This doesn't mean you should go to the other extreme and fall into paranoia - that'll make it impossible to enjoy your experience abroad. As always, a sane balance is required; if you can find it, you'll naturally steer clear of negative situations while keeping a positive attitude. And don't be upset for the occasional, inevitable mistake. Be patient with yourself and you'll learn to adapt more effectively.

### 4. Talk local, not tourist.

You can get by pretty well with English in most countries, but you should definitely put in the effort to learn (or deepen your knowledge of) the local language if you want to get the most out of your study abroad experience. If you decide to take the easy way out and rely on your trusty old English, you'll miss out on a whole world of experiences and possibilities. Even the slightest effort at communicating with someone in their native language will yield good results: you'll be learning in the best and most practical way possible and others will respect you more for trying and will respond positively.

### 5. Walk local, not tourist.

No, just kidding.

### 5. The last thing you want to hear.

This is a boring point; probably the last thing you want to hear. Basically, if you haven't already, you'll have to learn how to be self-responsible. And this is a good thing! It'll feel good to know you can handle all the little aspects of daily life without having to rely on someone else. It's crucial to be able to plan well and budget money wisely.