

CULTURE PACKET



We are super excited that you
decided to be a part of GRENADA 24-7 !



DID YOU KNOW?...

You'll bring more on your trip than just your suitcase and flip-flops.

In fact, anytime you visit another country, you take along a lot more than just what's in your suitcase. Not only will you bring your physical baggage to Grenada you'll also bring along your "cultural baggage".

WHAT'S IN YOUR BAGS?

Your cultural baggage (or culture) is the collection of all the values, beliefs, concepts, and behaviors that you learned as a child and that will have a great effect on the way you see the world.

Keep in mind that your baggage is unique to your upbringing and will most certainly be different than the Grenadians.

THAT'S WHY THIS BOOK IS FOR YOU

As you think about your upcoming trip to Grenada you, no doubt, have certain hopes and expectations both from a ministry standpoint and for your own personal experience. Simply put, you want to feel good about your time in Grenada and you want to feel that your time was effective.

This booklet is to help make that happen!

Our hope is to guide you to a greater connection with God's heartbeat for Grenada. We designed this booklet not just to be information you read, but to interact with. This is to help prepare your heart and mind for understanding the Grenadian people and the cross-cultural differences between Grenada and the U.S. This booklet is in no way meant to be comprehensive but merely a "first step" to help you understand and engage with God's heart.



“Despite the evidence that groups are different from each other, we tend to believe that deep inside all people are the same.

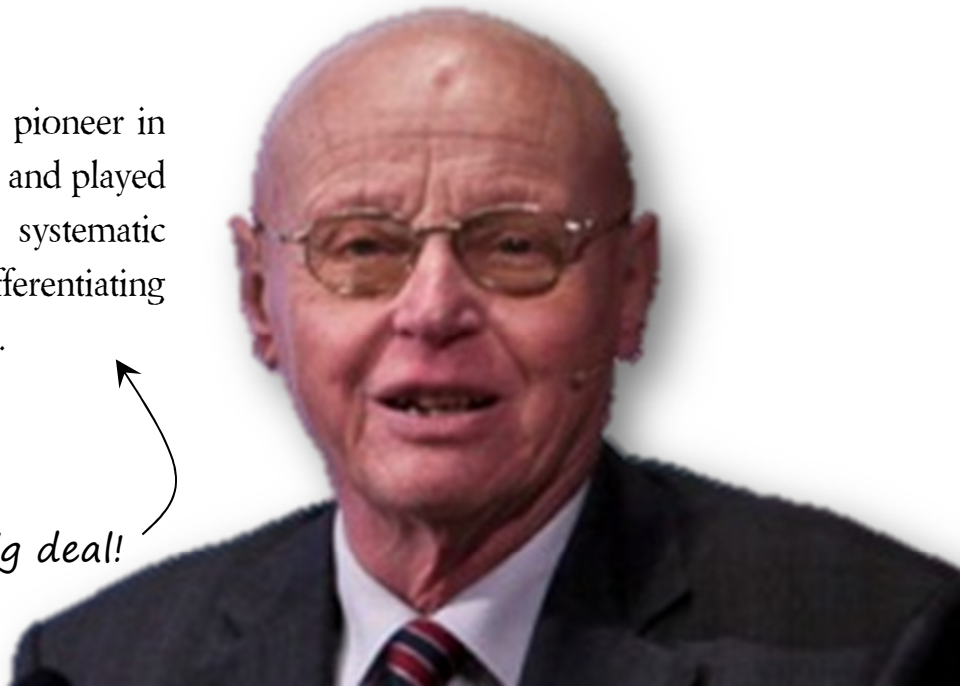
In fact, as we’re generally ignorant of other countries’ cultures, we tend to minimize the cultural differences.

This leads to misunderstandings and misinterpretations.”

-Geert Hofstede

Geert Hofstede is a well-known pioneer in his research of cross-cultural groups and played a major role in developing a systematic framework for assessing and differentiating national and organizational cultures.

Simply put... he's kind of a big deal!



CULTURAL BAGGAGE GAME SHOW



RULES OF THE GAME:

It's Simple! Just answer the question...

(But you have to read the question in a cheesy game show host voice)

FIRST QUESTION: You see two guys walking down the street holding hands. The reason they're holding hands is because they're...

QUESTION #2: You cooked dinner for a friend and asked them how they liked it. They shrug their shoulders and say "it was okay." How much did they really like it??

QUESTION #3: Two guys are in front of a shop yelling at each other. The reason they are yelling is because they are...

LAST QUESTION: You're out with friends and one of them says to you: "You're looking fat." How do you feel about that?



DID YOU KNOW...

Most Americans have the same answers to these questions.

BUT a Grenadian's answer would be totally different!

And someone from India would have another set of different answers!

The reason for this is because what we saw happening in the above scenarios... We only saw what we saw because our culture told us to see it that way.

WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH CULTURE?

#1 Culture is like an iceberg!

Just as 90% of an iceberg is below the water line (and therefore not visible), the same is true with culture. There will be things about Grenadians that you will perceive immediately... HOWEVER... there will be much more that you will not easily perceive or understand.



#2 Culture influences perceptions!

In other words, you see the world and react to it in ways that your culture has taught you to see and react. However, the way you perceive the world (we call that your worldview) is not necessarily the way other groups perceive the world. We each see the world through different filtering lenses, so to speak.



For Example...

In the space below, write your observations about what is going on in this photo...



United States



Grenada



TIME ORIENTATION

There are cultural differences in how people understand and use time.

Monochronic individuals prefer to complete one task at a time. For them, task-oriented time is distinguished from socio-emotional time. In other words, there is a time to play and a time to work. They value punctuality, completing tasks, and keeping to schedules. They view time as if it were linear, that is, one event happening at a time.

Polychronic individuals, on the other hand, are more flexible about time schedules; they have no problem integrating task-oriented activities with socio-emotional ones. For them, maintaining relationships and socializing are more important than accomplishing tasks. These individuals usually see time in a more holistic manner; in other words, many events may happen at once.

For Example:

In the U.S., it's expected to find bus/train schedules and for that train to arrive on time. For polychronic individuals (i.e. Grenadians) such precise timetables are mind-boggling, as many of them are simply used to going to the bus stop and waiting — not knowing whether they'll be waiting for five or forty-five minutes. They're not upset or anxious over this... that is just the way things are.

Keep in mind... This has nothing to do with being 'laid back' versus 'uptight' or being Type-A personality versus Type-B... this has to do with how you're wired to view time.

IMAGINE... You're meeting a couple for lunch at 11:30. It's 11:50 and you're still 15 minutes from the restaurant... How do you feel?

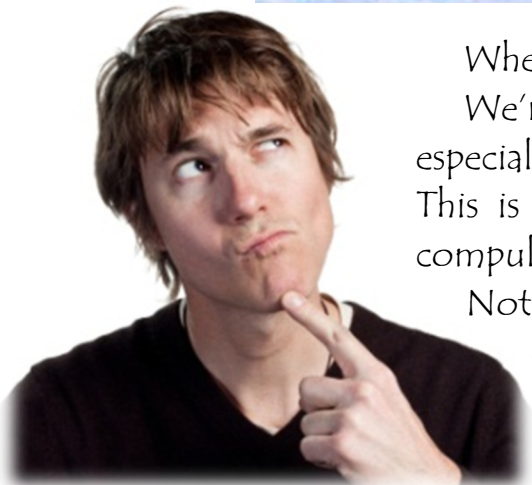
When Americans are late... we're anxious!

We're uncomfortable knowing we're "off-schedule", especially when we know people are waiting on us to arrive. This is evident by our driving habits when late and our compulsion for apologies when we arrive.

Not only is our culture uncomfortable with being late or "off-schedule", but we've judged it as rude!

More on this later...

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES





INDIVIDUALISM vs COLLECTIVISM

There are cultural differences in whether the welfare of the individual or that of the group is more valued in a society.

In **individualistic** societies, the goals of individuals are valued more highly than the goals of the group. Individuals are rewarded for behaving independently, making their own plans, and working toward achieving their personal goals. In these societies, individuals are hired and promoted largely based on individual achievement and qualifications.

For Example:

Grenadians see themselves as “in this life together”. This collectivism is seen in their basic daily decisions. The Grenadian flag is flown on most patios and the national colors are often worn. It’s considered rude not to talk to strangers and often food and resources are shared without hesitance.

In the U.S. these decisions are rare and strange.

In **collectivistic** societies, on the other hand, the needs of the group are considered more important than those of the individual. In these societies, kinship ties are much stronger and may take precedence over expertise in matters of appointments and promotions.

A VAST DIFFERENCE

In the U.S. we have our own money and our own stuff. If we lack 2-3 ingredients for a recipe we go to the store and buy what we need. What isn’t used goes into our pantry for the next time we need it.

The only times we would ever ask for or give other people food is in a last resort or “crisis” situation. AND, if you did ask your neighbor for food and they knew you could easily just go to the store... they would be offended and put out.

Another example is arranged marriages, which they used to do in Grenada. You marry whomever your family chooses or whoever is best for the family. In the U.S., on the other hand, you marry whomever you choose, the implication being that it’s your decision and you choose the one best for you. In this case, the welfare of the individual takes precedence over the welfare of the family.

In Grenada, it’s this American mindset that’s off-putting. The Grenadian would be confused why you wouldn’t want to give your neighbor the ingredients they need. Likewise, it wouldn’t make sense to them why if it’s your neighbor you couldn’t just go up to them and ask for what you need.

In fact, if the person asking was a beggar, the Grenadian would be less likely to give... a decision strange to an American. But this is because the sharing of foodstuff (and other goods as well) is not about doing a charitable deed (as it is in the US) but is about fulfilling your role in the community.



The American Dream expresses our culture perfectly!!

James Truslow Adams, who coined the phrase in 1931 describes it as, “that dream of a land where life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each... regardless of social class or circumstances of birth.”

The American Dream is founded in our American ideals in which freedom is defined as the opportunity for prosperity and success, and an upward social mobility achieved through hard work.

The idea of the American Dream is rooted in the Declaration of Independence which proclaims that "all men are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights" including "Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

THE CHALLENGE...

is to not judge the whole of earth through the lens of the “American” dream. We need to realize that how we define success and prosperity IS NOT the same as how other cultures (such as Grenada) define it.

Moreover, we need to come to grips with the reality that core beliefs of the American Dream (i.e. human equality and hard work being the key to success) are just not reality in most cultures.



THE MYTH OF COMMON COURTESY

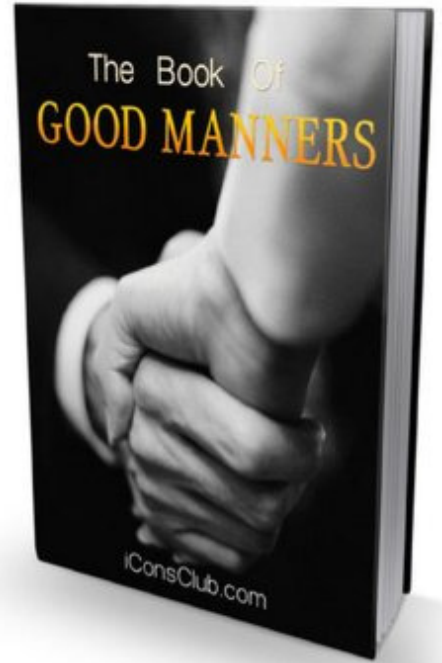
“Some things are just common courtesy!”

“It doesn't matter where they're from... they should know better!”

“That was rude in any culture!”

Make a list of things considered “common courtesy”:

- Chew food with mouth closed
- Say please and thank-you
-
-
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CRAZY QUESTION:

Is spitting on someone rude?

No Spitting

Probably, right?... but turn the page to find out!



CHECK THIS OUT!

Female villager in Sudan spits on George Clooney - in a good luck ritual

BY NINA MANDELL
DAILY NEWS STAFF WRITER
Sunday, December 05, 2010



While most women swoon when George Clooney is in their presence, one woman spit on the Hollywood heartthrob during his trip to Sudan.

But it was for good luck, the actor said, according to the Daily Mail. Clooney, who appeared with Ann Curry on a Dateline NBC special to discuss the conflict in the war-torn country, was spit on by a female village elder.

In the village of Abyei, spitting on one's head is considered a polite greeting and is supposed to bring the spit receiver luck.

The movie star seemed unperturbed.

"It was a tradition I haven't seen," he reportedly said. "She pulls you down and spits into your hands, then she pulls your head down and spits on top of your head."

Though doubtful, Clooney said he had been spit on before.

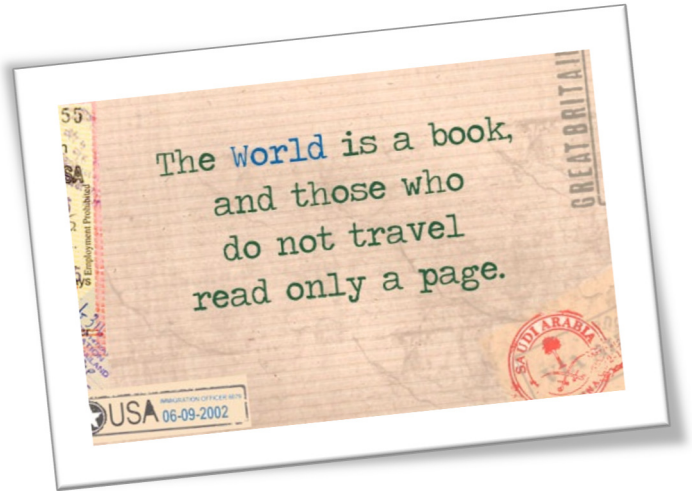
"It wasn't a blessing [then]," he reportedly joked.

MORE "CRAZY" CULTURAL PRACTICES...

In Germany, the Thursday night before a wedding, all the guests smash old dishes on the ground, trying to break things in the smallest pieces possible. This is supposed to bring luck to the soon-to-be-married couple. The future bride and groom have to then clean up all the pieces before midnight, and the guests are supposed to make the cleaning-up process rather difficult, by for example tipping over a wheelbarrow full of broken dishes or spreading the pieces everywhere.

Every year, in central India, parents get together to throw their babies off the top of a 50 foot tower. The babies are caught in a sheet held by other villagers on the ground. The parents believe that the practice will give their children long and healthy lives.

TRUTH ~~THE MYTH~~ OF COMMON COURTESY



“Common sense and courtesy is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.”

–*Albert Einstein*

The BIG question of “common courtesy” is:

Where are these acts of courtesy common?

The stage is set for problems when we believe that our acts of courtesy, which are common place in our culture, are universal signs of respect anywhere. This just isn't true.

“UNFORTUNATELY, despite the evidence that groups are different from each other, we tend to believe that deep inside all people are the same. In fact, as we're generally ignorant of other countries' cultures, we tend to minimize the cultural differences...”

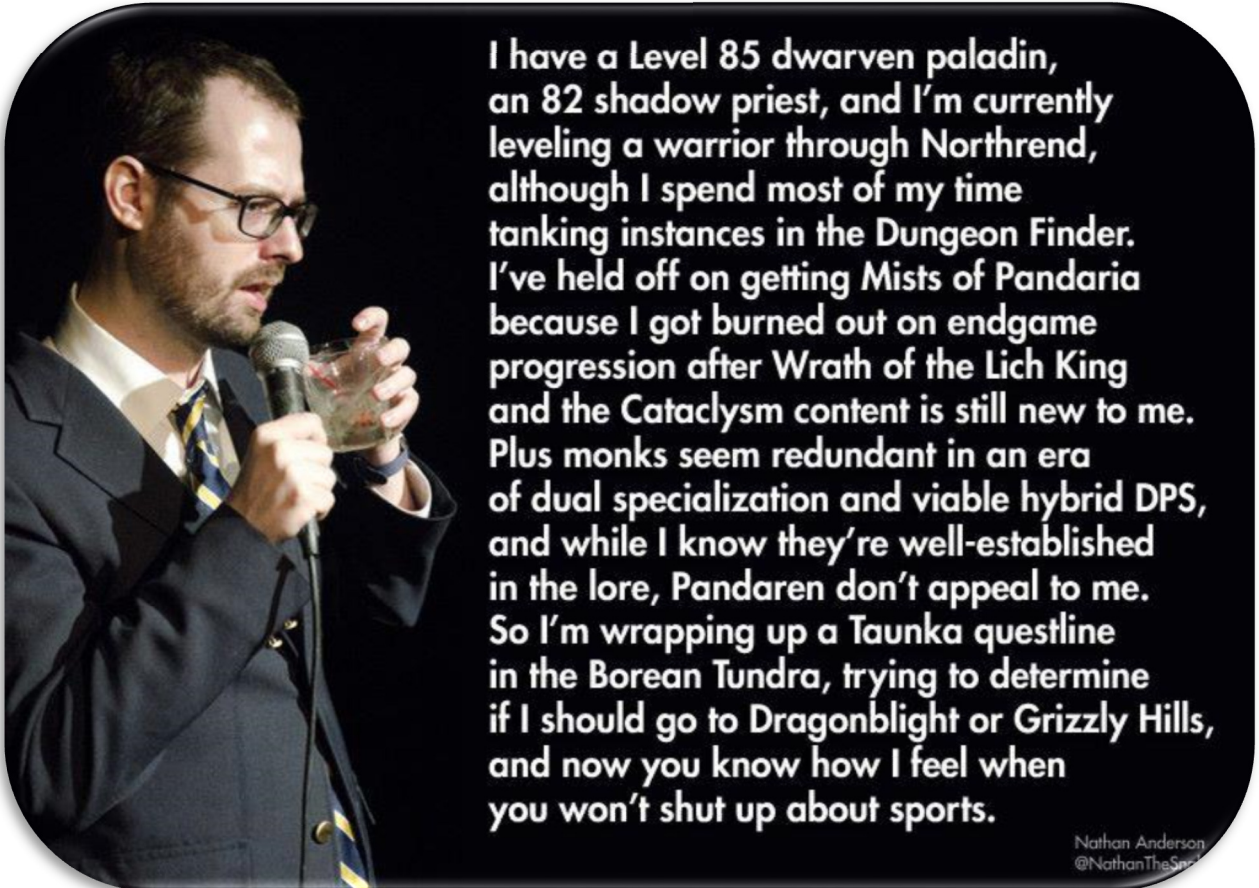
–*Geert Hofstede*



KEEP IN MIND...

Part of minimizing cultural differences is not just denying the fact that differences exist... BUT the effects those differences have in preventing us from truly understanding each other.

This was sent to us by a friend of ours who is really into gaming and has no interest in sports. It's a great example of how (even in our own country) there are subcultures that "disconnect" us... dare we say even baffle us!



**I HAVE NO CLUE WHAT
THAT GUY JUST SAID?!**



LESSONS FROM

LANDLORDS AND MONKEYS

A giant storm had temporarily stranded a monkey on an island. In a secure, protected place on the shore, while waiting for the raging waters to recede, he spotted a fish swimming against the current. It seemed obvious to the monkey that the fish was struggling and in need of assistance. Being of kind heart, the monkey resolved to help the fish.



A tree precariously dangled over the spot where the fish seemed to be struggling. At considerable risk to himself, the monkey moved far out on a limb, reached down and snatched the fish from the threatening waters. Immediately scurrying back to the safety of his shelter, he carefully laid the fish on dry ground. For a few moments the fish showed excitement, but soon settled into a peaceful rest.

Joy and satisfaction swelled inside the monkey. He had successfully helped another creature.

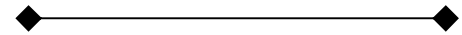
CAPTAIN OBVIOUS SAYS





BY THE WAY...

We were told this story of the monkey and the fish by our friend Dr. Duane Elmer, who has traveled to and taught in over 75 countries. The story is actually an old Tanzanian folktale. However the folktale differs slightly in detail and adds more “food for thought”.



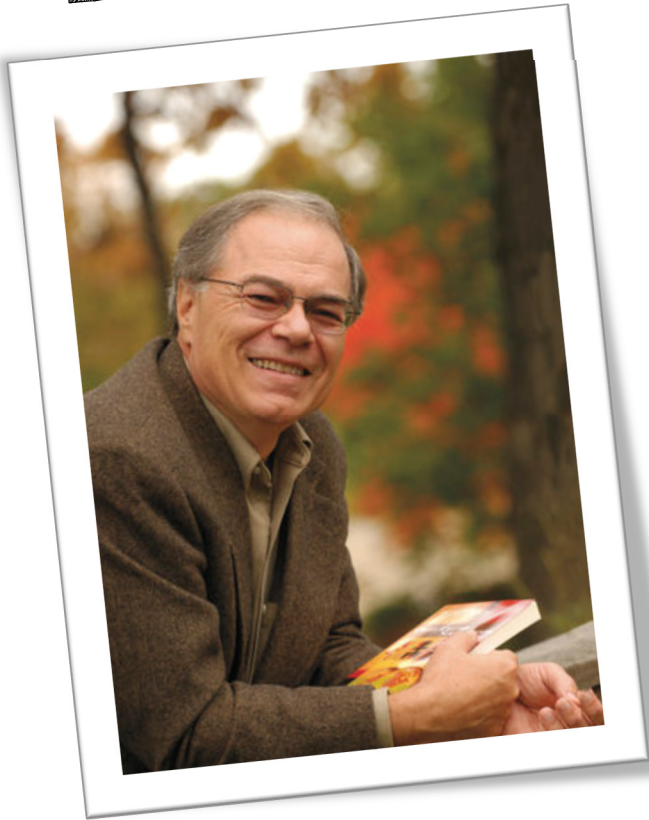
The rainy season that year had been the strongest ever and the river had broken its banks. There were floods everywhere and the animals were all running up into the hills. The floods came so fast that many drowned except the lucky monkeys who used their proverbial agility to climb up into the treetops.

One of the monkeys saw the fish and shouted to his companion: “Look down, my friend, look at those poor creatures. They are going to drown. Do you see how they struggle in the water?” “Yes,” said the other monkey. “What a pity! Probably they were late in escaping to the hills because they seem to have no legs. How can we save them?” “I think we must do something. Let’s go close to the edge of the flood where the water is not deep enough to cover us, and we can help them to get out.”

So the monkeys did just that. They started catching the fish, but not without difficulty. One by one, they brought them out of the water and put them carefully on the dry land. After a short time there was a pile of fish lying on the grass motionless. One of the monkeys said, “Do you see? They were tired, but now they are just sleeping and resting. Had it not been for us, my friend, all these poor people without legs would have drowned.”

The other monkey said: “They were trying to escape from us because they could not understand our good intentions. But when they wake up they will be very grateful because we have brought them salvation.”

Dr. Duane's thoughts on the monkey...



First, the monkey was courageous, had good intentions and noble motives. He also had zeal. However, his motives were misdirected because of his ignorance – he could not see beyond his own frame of reference. He believed what was dangerous for him was dangerous for the fish. Therefore, what would be good for him would also be good for the fish – a fatal assumption. As a result, he acted out of his ignorance or limited frame of reference, and ended up doing damage rather than the good he intended.

Unfortunately, the monkey may not even have known the damage he did, because he walked away leaving the fish “resting.”

✓ What doubts do you have about your need for a cross-cultural training booklet like this one? Why?


✓ Have you seen anyone act like the monkey?
Have you ever acted like the monkey?
What was the result?

✓ List the things that you think Grenadians need?

-
-
-
-
-



✓ How can you discover whether what you listed will really meet their needs?



Mike Pettengill is the director of a mission team serving in La Ceiba, Honduras. Before accepting God's call to fulltime missions, Mike worked in the California State Senate. His calling has led him to work all over Central and South America teaching and counseling international refugees.

In other words... he has lots of experience sharing the Gospel with people TOTALLY different than him.

In the next 500 words I hope to address one of the most complicated issues in missions... cultural bias.

The gospel is neither American nor Western, which is why it is imperative modern-day missionaries not revert to tactics of the late 19th century and try to impose our "superior" culture on the people we have been sent to serve. Though the gospel changes cultures, messengers of the gospel should never seek to modify a culture to make it more like their own.

Our landlord just had our house painted. The painters did their work in a very Honduran way, which in the U.S. would be viewed as lazy, sub-standard and unacceptable. For example: white paint was on black paint, blue paint was on white paint, paint was on windows and there were few straight lines or right angles. And, here is the part that is going to get under your skin (and it would have me too a few years ago)...that's ok. The way they painted is not wrong. It just is. Why do we, in the U.S., insist on straight lines, right angles and non-touching paint? Yes, I know, you are screaming at your computer screen, "BECAUSE IT IS THE RIGHT WAY!!!"

As fulltime missionaries we have hosted over 500 short-term missionaries and they all struggle with seeing things through culturally biased glasses...as we all do. We have been asked many culturally biased questions: "Why are Hondurans so lazy?", "Why don't they care about their community and throw trash on the ground?", "Why are Hondurans always late?" These are questions that originate from the concept that our culture (no matter what culture it is) is better. We all believe that our way of doing things is best. And although it's natural to think this way... it's not healthy in cross-cultural settings. As a cross-cultural missionary one must look at cultural differences and say, "It's not bad, just different."

As believers in Christ we are called to sacrifice our old biases and adopt a perspective that determines right or wrong based on God's revelation. It is crucial that servants of the faith not confuse culture customs with sinful choices. Keep in mind the culture of the United States is just as sinful as any other. We in America often fail to heed Scripture's call to change our viewpoint and analyze the world based on Christ's standards.

In his book *Love in Hard Places* D. A. Carson writes,

"What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together because they have all been loved by Jesus himself. They are a band of natural enemies who love one another for Jesus' sake."

Missionaries are not sent to change cultures, but to deliver the life-changing gospel of Jesus Christ. When we as cross-cultural missionaries get bogged down in cultural bias we miss the point of missions. While we deliver the good news of Jesus we should celebrate and enjoy cultural differences without passing judgment. Christianity is global and our multi-ethnic family should rejoice in diversity and proclaim our unity in Christ. Let's not weigh down the purity of the gospel with our cultural biases.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The applications are as endless as the situations you'll find yourself in. Obviously, there's no way to cover them all. Fact is, you'll always find yourself in "learning" situations even if you've had all the cross-cultural training in the world. Take for example our friend Dr. Duane Elmer, author and teacher, who's considered a leading voice in being cross culturally sensitive. Even he, after an African man spit on his son (as a blessing, though he didn't know that at the time) wanted to punch the guy in the face.

Cultural sensitivity is not about perfection but humility.



Is there anything about Grenada (or another place you've been) that you viewed negatively (i.e. as a flaw) that now you realize is not wrong, it's just different?

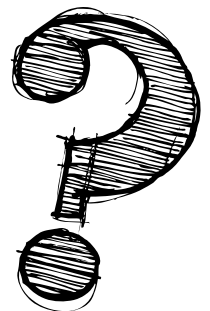
Humility is not weakness; it's knowing who you are and the role you play in the world around you.



How has humility been developed in your life because of what you've learned here?

What lessons have you learned from this booklet that you can immediately apply to your life: Don't write generic universal applications. Write down 3 that apply to you specifically.

-
-
-



PLEASE PRINT THE NEXT 5 PAGES
AND BRING THEM WITH YOU.

THIS IS YOUR "DISCUSSION AND NOTES" BOOKLET
YOU'LL USE FOR THE WORKSHOP.

*YOU DO NOT NEED TO PRINT THEM IN COLOR

DISCUSSION WORKSHEETS

(We'll use these pages during the trip.)



WHAT DID YOU BRING
IN YOUR BAGS ???...



It's a different culture because

what happens if we reject this



“They may reject _____ religion, philosophy and presentation—
but they're still receptive to a relational God...

so I must find a _____ to understand and engage the differences.”

#2



All cultures act _____



“Different cultures may not make sense to _____

That's because _____ don't understand it.”

My way is _____





Our culture

#3



vs

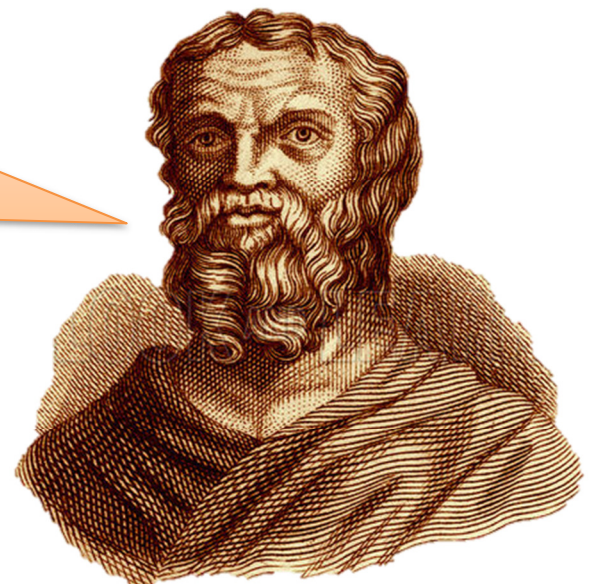


#3.2

And we think our culture is

"If someone were to put a proposition before men bidding them choose, after examination, the best customs in the world, each nation would certainly select its own."

-Herodotus, 430 BC



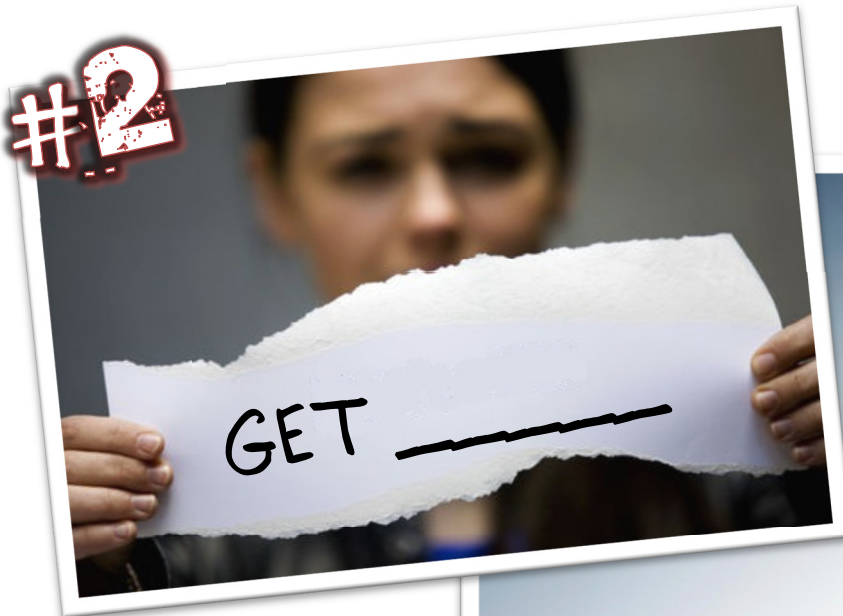


Our brain constantly makes judgments without us even thinking—because its job is to make sense of what’s going on.

HOWEVER, once you’ve said:

“THIS is the way it is!”

It’s really hard to see it otherwise.



#3

BE _____

"A HUMBLE PERSON IS MORE CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT IS RIGHT THAN ABOUT BEING RIGHT, ABOUT ACTING ON GOOD IDEAS THAN HAVING GOOD IDEAS, ABOUT EMBRACING NEW TRUTH THAN DEFENDING OUTDATED POSITION, ABOUT BUILDING THE TEAM THAN EXALTING SELF, ABOUT RECOGNIZING CONTRIBUTION, THAN BEING RECOGNIZED FOR MAKING IT."

-STEPHEN M.R. COVEY

final
thoughts

PLEASE READ THE NEXT PAGES

BEFORE YOU VISIT US

THEY ARE ARTICLES AND LISTS THAT WE WILL
DISCUSS DURING THE WORKSHOP

*YOU DO NOT NEED TO PRINT THEM

The CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR®

AS HOSTAGE STANDOFFS END, NO CHEERING FROM PARISIANS

PARIS-- Watching the conclusion of France's worst terrorist attack in modern history from a Paris cafe has been a mighty test in cultural understanding, to say the least. Imagine if a similar attack happened in the US: masked gunmen killed 12 people at a newspaper, the suspects escaped, and later sparked not one but two hostage situations. Watching the end of it would bring widespread relief among Americans – I imagine clapping, maybe even cheering.

Here, as I sit typing away, no one is paying attention.

As French security forces killed the terrorists, the news was drowned out by talk over coffee and tea. The café's staff eventually turned off the overhead music and turned up the volume on the television news. But people have been talking over it the entire time. I have been trying to find out why. I told the waiter in the cafe that I imagine that if people were talking over the developments of such a major news story in the US, they might be yelled at by indignant clientele who wanted to hear what was being said. I told him that since the attack I had been glued to my television screen. When I finally got to the street, I was actually spooked to find a city still operating relatively normally. As the drama was playing out, not even a few blocks from where I was, people didn't seem bothered or terrorized. It definitely wasn't playing out the way it would in an American city.

The waiter said "For me, the fact that the police killed the terrorist isn't a relief, I think this is just the beginning," striking a pessimistic but matter-of-fact tone. He went on to explain that the French are less optimistic than Americans. He said his own viewpoint, that this just marks the beginning, is typical of French pessimism— that worse things are always to come. Maybe that's why people weren't paying attention.

Another gentleman said that, "We in France are always moaning, we don't have the same kind of American unity or togetherness... Maybe it's a way of protecting ourselves. We keep a distance."



SOME JAPANESE SEE SLAIN HOSTAGES AS TROUBLEMAKERS

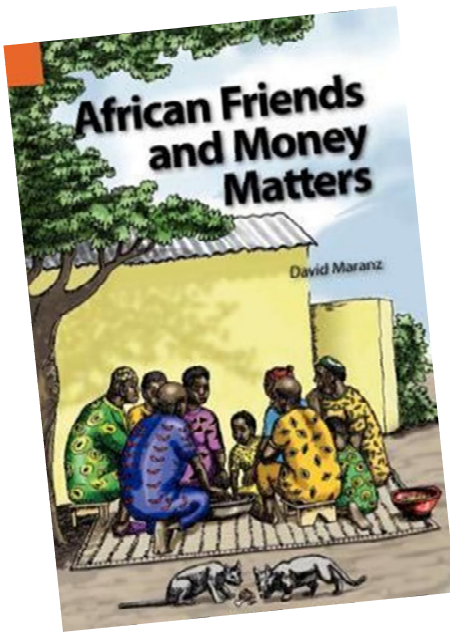
TOKYO-- In Japan, where conformity takes precedence over individuality, one of the most important values is to avoid causing trouble for others. And sympathy aside, the two Japanese killed by the Islamic State group are now widely viewed as troublemakers.

"To be honest, they caused tremendous trouble to the Japanese government and to the Japanese people. In the old days, their parents would have had to commit hara-kiri (ritual suicide) to apologize," said Taeko Sakamoto, a 64-year-old worker, after first expressing sympathy over their deaths.

The public's response to the hostages, Yukawa and Goto, was chilly from the beginning. Few seemed to sympathize with Yukawa, a 42-year-old gun aficionado and adventurer who was taken hostage in August. Goto's reputation as a veteran journalist won him more sympathy. Still both victims' families apologized repeatedly to the government and the people for "the trouble" their sons caused, even after they died.

Just two days after the Prime Minister's office put a national flag at half-staff to mourn for the pair, a senior member of his ruling party cast Goto as a troublemaker, not a tragic hero.

When three young Japanese were taken hostage in Iraq and later freed in 2004, they faced nationwide bashing as troublemakers. They had to cover their own medical examinations and part of their chartered flights home.



“A seemingly illogical episode happened to me in the early 1980s in an African capital city. Telephones were rare and difficult to obtain. Public telephone booths were just being installed in a few scattered locations in the city. An intelligent young man, whom I will call Clark, was working for me. One day I needed information about arrival times for airline flights. I told Clark that he would not need to go all the way to the airline’s office, as there was now a telephone booth just a couple of blocks from where my office was located, so he could get the information by phone. I gave him some money and he set out early in the working day. Hours passed and Clark did not return. I was afraid he might have been in an accident, not a rare thing in that city.

Lunch time came and no word from Clark. Finally, in the middle of the afternoon, he arrived back. He told me that he had tried to use the phone near the office but it was out of order. Consequently, he took the bus to the center of the city, found a telephone booth on the main square, and proceeded to phone the airline. He had continued for all those hours to reach the airline by phone, dialing and redialing, but never getting through. All this time he was within sight of the airline’s office which was located across the square about one hundred yards away. I was dumbfounded. How could he be so stupid? The information he was trying to obtain by phone was available just a two-minute walk away! I knew he was honest, so I believed his story. I also knew he was intelligent, so there had to be a reason for his apparently bizarre behavior.

The reason for this seeming inexplicable behavior was that I had during the months he had worked for me, asked him to do many things that were for him senseless and meaningless. I was not particularly aware of this, but realized it in retrospect. I had not taken the time to explain the reasons behind many assignments, so he was accustomed to just trying to follow my instructions without understanding my purposes. This episode was just one of a series. Telephones were new to him, airlines were unfamiliar, the need to obtain flight information and where it came from was new. In his mind my emphasis on telephoning meant that I wanted him to obtain the information by telephone, thinking that was important to me. For me, on the other hand, I had only emphasized the telephone aspect because I wanted to minimize the time his errand would take. My only real interest was the flight information, but he did not know this.”



THE LAND OF BIG GROCERIES, BIG GOD, AND SMOOTH TRAFFIC: WHAT SURPRISES FIRST-TIME VISITORS TO AMERICA

Years before Peter Vanovich came to America, he watched the movie National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation. When it showed Chevy Chase stringing up an over-the-top Christmas lights display, Peter laughed, but not just because of Chase's slapstick antics. The entire idea of blanketing the front of your house in Christmas lights, he told a reporter, had to be a joke. "Movies always go to extremes just to make it funny. When I saw it I thought, this cannot be true."

Imagine Peter's surprise when he moved to Fargo, North Dakota, and on one December night drove down a suburban street. "Some people had not only lights, but they had **THE** lights," he told the radio reporter of his jaw-dropping first Christmas in America. "And I said to my wife, 'they really do decorate their houses as Chevy Chase did'."

This American Life Radio Show, talked to foreigners who'd moved to the U.S. and found that they were shocked by a number of things that Americans might consider routine: public displays of affection, not being able to haggle prices at the stores, families shipping their elderly parents off to nursing homes, dog-owners kissing their pets, stores that never close, devoutly following traffic laws, and widespread gun ownership.

"Just take a quick look and don't turn your face," a horrified Iraqi father told his children when their car pulled alongside a gun-toting motorcyclist. The kids, frightened by what they'd believed was a tool of only police and criminals, asked, "Why does he have a gun? What is he planning to do?"

One immigrant from China told of his first night in the States. It was Oct. 31st (known to us as Halloween). The entire night, strangers rang their door bell dressed up as demons and monsters demanding food. He said the family spent much of the night, huddled together under a table with all the lights off in the house, completely terrified.

The U.S. can be such a jarringly strange place for many foreign visitors that travel guidebooks detail everything from the dangers of talking politics to tips on respecting Americans' famously guarded personal space. But what do those visitors find when they actually get here? This American Life Radio Show asked visitors from around the globe to chime in with what surprised them about America. Below are some of the highlights:

Impossibly well-stocked supermarkets: If you've ever visited a grocery in the developing world, you can probably understand the wonder that many foreigners feel at first seeing America's gleaming stores, stuffed with remarkably fresh produce from every season, no matter the time of year. A South Asian friend specifically noted the "variety" in the groceries, and some have asked me, incredulous, what happens to all the produce that doesn't get sold.

Americans really love Old Glory: For Americans like me, growing up in schools where you're expected to fold your hand over your heart and pledge your allegiance to the U.S. flag every morning seems normal, even banal. But this is less common in other countries, and I've found that study-abroad students can find it surprising, even creepy. A student from Brazil added that he was surprised by "the amount of US flags you see around, from every spot, in every city I've been to."

They also love God: "Americans are a lot more religious than I ever assumed from watching American television," a Pakistani friend told me when asked what surprised her about first coming to America. A visitor from Ireland listed examples: "Prayer breakfasts in the White House. Educated people believing in creationism. The mass number of churches and denominations. People actually going to church."

What do you mean I can't haggle?: In many parts of the world, prices on just about anything are up for negotiation, but in the U.S. it's basically limited to used cars and Craigslist. I've heard more than a few stories of well-meaning foreign shoppers taking a cashier's refusal to bargain as mere coyness. A student said of her Russian relatives, "At one-off vintage shops and even restaurants, the idea of not talking out price left them a little upset and very surprised."

So much junk food, if you can call it food: An Indonesian friend mused at "popularity of synthetic food products," from Baconnaise to Bud Light Lime-a-Rita to spray-on butter. Visitors from several corners of the globe said they were in awe of the portions; one from Eastern Europe (which, in my experience, has enormous portions) said he still had to split restaurant entrees with his wife. Several Indian visitors described their awe at the mass and accessibility of American food. Several were surprised by the free refills. "Even most of McDonalds, KFCs etc outside the US don't have that," one wrote. Another was surprised by "How you can take your remaining food back home in a box from a restaurant."

How do they get everyone to obey traffic laws?: Most foreigners are amazed at how devoutly American drivers follow the rules of the road. Compared to the U.S., driving in many developing world cities can feel like organized chaos, with motorists ignoring not just stoplights and speed signs but lane markers and even the direction

of traffic. If you go to Cairo and rent a car (side note: don't rent a car in Cairo), you're obligated to follow the standard every-man-for-himself style if you want to get anywhere; drive like you're back in the U.S. and you'll never leave the parking lot. The miracle of American roads, as outsiders have described it to me, is that it only really works if *everyone* follows the written rules and unwritten norms alike, and they do.

Nothing like what I saw on *Friends*: The U.S. is about as famous as a country can get. People around the world experience it through the American films and TV shows that dominate global entertainment. But those media portrayals can sometimes add more confusion than they dispel. A Chinese friend once insisted that *of course* 20-something Americans all get new boyfriends and girlfriends every single week: she'd seen it on *Friends*, and *Seinfeld*, and *Sex and the City*, and a half dozen other TV shows. They couldn't all be lying.

Nothing like what I'd heard at home: This quote from an Indian visitor captures just how dim a view much of the world takes of some American social customs, particularly our practice of putting elderly in retirement homes:

“Many Indians are very surprised to find out that there are large numbers of Americans who actually love their parents and siblings and wives and children and have normal, healthy relationships with them. Our media has them convinced that all Americans are very self-centered people who throw their kids out of their homes after high school, don't care for their parents, and divorce their spouses. And, I swear, it is literally true that many Indians do not believe that this is not true until they have been to the US and seen examples of good healthy family relationships themselves. I have had heated arguments with people who've never been to the US, but can give lectures on how screwed up family values in the US are.”

Where are the cowboys?: Sometimes, America as-seen-in-movies has a bigger reputation than the real thing. A man from Eastern Europe experienced an extreme version of this common surprise: "When we escaped Czechoslovakia in 1981 (which was still communist at the time), I was only 8 and thought that 'America' was still every bit pre-1900's wild-west/Bonanza-like. Maybe it was all I saw on TV? In any case, I was expecting horses tied up to posts in front of the post office or general store. Imagine my surprise!" It's a reminder that even a country as famous as America is just like any other: you don't really know it until you visit.



TEN TRAVEL TIPS FOR JAPANESE VISITING AMERICA

This was taken from a booklet published by the Japanese government to help their citizens navigate cultural differences while in the U.S.

1. THERE IS A THING CALLED “DINNER PLATES” AND WHAT GOES ON THEM IS A MIGHTY DISAPPOINTMENT.

In Japan, each person eating gets as many individual dishes as needed for the meal. Sometimes more than 10 dishes per person are used. In America, there is a method where a large bowl or dish is placed in the middle of the table, and you take as much as you like from there, and put it on a big dish said to be a “dinner plate.”

In Japan, meals at home are for eating, because your stomach is vacant. At an American’s dinner, there is food, decorations on the table and tableware, and music to produce a fun atmosphere. It is a time for maintaining rich human relationships. Therefore, the meal is as long as 40 minutes. In addition, often the decorative tableware has been handed down mother to daughter, two generations, three generations. In addition, there are even more valuable dishes used for Christmas and Thanksgiving.

American food is flat to the taste, indifferent in the subtle difference of taste. There is no such thing there as a little “secret ingredient.” Sugar, salt, pepper, oils, and routine spices are used for family meals. There is no such thing as purely U.S. cuisine, except the hamburger, which isn’t made at home so much. There is almost nothing special to eat based on the different seasons of the year. Basically, they like sweet, high fat, high calories things.

2. BEWARE ROUGH AREAS WHERE THE CLOTHES DEMAND ATTENTION

In Japan, hip hop clothes are considered stylish. But in the United States, it is wise to avoid them, as you might be mistaken for a member of a street gang. The entire United States does not have good security, unfortunately. However, the difference between a place with good regional security and a “rough area” is clear. People walk less, there is a lot of graffiti, windows and doors are strictly fitted with bars. And young people are dressed in hip hop clothes that say “I want you to pay attention to me!”

3. BUT YOU'LL BE PLEASANTLY SURPRISED BY AMERICAN TRAFFIC PATTERNS.

Manners with cars in America are really darn good. Japanese people should be embarrassed when they look at how good car manners are in America. You must wait whenever you cross an intersection for the traffic light. People don't get pushy to go first. Except for some people, everyone keeps exactly to the speed limit. America is a car society, but their darn good manners are not limited to cars.

4. NOBODY IS IMPRESSED BY HOW MUCH YOU CAN DRINK. IN FACT, SHAME ON YOU.

In the U.S., they do not have a sense of superiority if they are able to drink a large amount. Rather, if you drink a lot, there is a sense that you cannot manage yourself. There is something close to contempt toward someone who must drink a lot to be drunk. To drink alcohol habitually is to have alcoholism. Alcoholics are weak people mentally, to be one means you have spanned the label of social outcasts that can't self-manage.

Non-smokers are more important than smokers in the US. Smokers capture the concept that they are not able to control themselves, and are the owners of weak character.

5. THEY HAVE FREE TIME ALL WEEK LONG!

In America, whether you are a student, working person, or housewife, you carefully make room for leisure time, weekdays and weekends. Most people are ensured free time, always. During the week they use it for walking, jogging, bicycling, tennis, racquetball, bowling, watching movies, reading, and volunteering. On the weekend, they enjoy even more freedom, and take liberal arts courses and have sporting leisures.

In Japan we believe that there is no free time during the weekday. Only the weekend. We spend the weekend watching TV, hanging around home, working, studying, and shopping, or listening to music.

6. KNOWING HOW TO USE SARCASM IS A MUST TO COMMUNICATE WITH AN AMERICAN.

If you put your bent middle and index fingers of both hands in the air, you are making finger quotation marks. It means you do not believe what you are saying. You can also say, "or so called."

7. THEY TEND TO HORSE LAUGH, EVEN THE WOMEN. IT'S HOW THEY SHOW THEY'RE HONEST.

In Japan, when a woman laughs, she places her hand so it does not show her mouth. It is disgraceful to laugh by loudly opening the mouth. Adult males do not laugh much. There is the saying, "Don't laugh so much that you show your teeth."

In America, when men or women laugh, they do not turn away. They face front, open the mouth, and laugh in a loud voice. This is because in America if you muffle your laugh or turn away while laughing, you give the impression that you are talking about a secret or name-calling. It is nasty.

8. YOU WON'T BE GETTING YOUR GROCERIES ANYTIME SOON, SO CHECKOUT LINES ARE A GREAT PLACE TO MAKE FRIENDS.

Cashiers are slow. Abysmally slow compared to Japan. I get frustrated when I'm in a hurry. Americans wait leisurely even if you're in the special checkout for buying just a little something. I thought Americans were going to be quite impatient, but in reality they are extremely laid back. I thought about what I should do with my time while waiting in the grocery line, and decided to speak with other guests.

9. THEIR VENDING MACHINES ARE RIDICULOUSLY LIMITED AND DISHONEST.

Vending machines in the United States just give carbonated beverages. Coke particularly. If you try to buy the juice from a vending machine when you're thirsty, it's just all carbonate. I pressed the button and thought it would be a nice orange juice, but carbonate came out. I love carbonated, but there are times when it will make you sick indeed.

10. BUT DARN IT ALL, THEY'RE SO WEIRDLY OPTIMISTIC YOU JUST CAN'T STAY IRRITATED AT THEM.

In Japan, there is great fear of failure and mistakes in front of other people. It is better to do nothing and avoid being criticized than to taste the humiliation of failure. As a result, there are things we wanted to do, but did not, and often regret. In America, you can make mistakes, fail, and it doesn't matter. It is a fundamental feeling that to sometimes be incorrect is natural. In addition, rather than thinking about mistakes and failures, American's have curiosity and say, "Let's try anyway!"

HELLO
MY NAME IS

Weirdo American

54 Weird Things About The U.S. That Americans Don't Realize Are Weird

1. HUGE portion sizes of food.
2. Flags everywhere. EVERYWHERE.
3. Smiling at strangers.
4. Price tags without tax included. "How do you know how much you're spending until you get to the cashier?"
5. Tipping is confusing.
6. Advertising for prescription drugs, as in "ask your doctor for brand x." In the U.K., "your doctor tells you what drugs you should take, not the other way around."
7. Everything being designed around cars.
8. Toilets that are too close to the floor and have "massive gaps around the door so that people can see in."
9. Pickles given with everything.
10. College football players being treated as celebrities. Aren't they just "students that do an extra-curricular activity"?
11. Jaywalking is a crime.
12. Soft drinks are free flowing. Unlimited refills.
13. Apparently we're really loud but friendly!
14. Way too much water in toilet bowls.
15. A relaxed approach to credit card security. Signatures don't matter and no one uses a PIN.
16. The Pledge of Allegiance sounds creepy with children chanting it.
17. Lawyer advertisements everywhere.
18. Students aren't competitive with each other, but collaborative.
19. Rich people are thin and well-maintained while poor people are fat.
20. Everyone has access to basic food, clothing, water, and sanitation.
21. We waste a lot of food.
22. Obsession with coffee.

23. The way we price our products makes “no apparent economic sense and is not linear at all.” Example: one Coke is \$1 but 12 cans of Coke is \$5.
24. You can “literally buy anything, including food, and return it within 90 days for a full refund” even without a specific reason for doing so.
25. The sheer volume of different varieties of pizza in the grocery stores.
26. Soda being cheaper than bottled water.
27. Our rest areas.
28. Restaurants and supermarkets every couple of miles on interstate highways.
29. Fruit and vegetable prices are higher than those of junk food.
30. An almost classless society.
31. Obtaining credit is extremely easy.
32. Putting last names first.
33. Restaurants take your plates away too soon.
34. Treating pets like people.
35. Toilet handles instead of buttons on top.
36. The light switches being “up for on and down for off.”
37. All sinks have a little hole in them to prevent overflow.
38. The number of trucks — SUV’s, pickups, 4-wheelers.
39. Huge trees.
40. Lots of blinds and not so many curtains.
41. People talk to themselves a lot and no one notices.
42. We’re obsessed with the weather.
43. Wearing shoes indoors.
44. Ice in every drink.
45. We’re very eager to invite people to our homes.
46. “Endless, costly political campaigning” without spending limits.
47. The greeting “how you doing?”... as a way of saying hello.
48. The sheer number of different churches and Christian denominations.
49. Public displays of affection in front of elders.
50. Sweet iced tea.
51. Not getting paid maternity/paternity leave.
52. Talking about work and asking what people do for a living in great detail at a social function.
53. Laws changing drastically between states.
54. Open carry of firearms.

1. DRIVING EVERYWHERE

--How big the country is and the amount of time you guys are willing to drive. I had a friend who drove for 16 hours to visit family for the weekend. It's baffling.

2. BEING ABLE TO BUY ANYTHING YOU WANT AT WAL-MART

--A friend came from the UK and he said Wal-mart was the weirdest thing, you could buy 24 rolls of toilet paper and a 12 gauge shotgun in the same store.

--I was not aware that you can buy guns in supermarkets in America. I thought you had to go to a dedicated gun store for that. Boy was I wrong.

3. PRICE TAGS

--You guys don't put the actual price on the price tag. The price you put is before tax, but that's not the actual price! Put the actual price!

4. AMERICA'S WEIRD VERSION OF PURITANISM

--You guys can't separate nudity from sex.

--...and extreme violence/gore is considered normal, and shown regularly on TV. It's pretty infuriating to live somewhere where something as natural and beautiful as the human body is viewed as taboo and "corrupts" our youth, but a guy getting his head cut off or getting beaten to death is perfectly okay for kids to watch. We're desensitizing the wrong thing.

5. CHEESE!!

--Amount of cheese Americans can intake at a time.

--Made Mac n cheese for my aussie cousins. Included 600 grams of cheese. They were floored (and clogged probably)

6. PUMPKIN EVERYTHING

--Pumpkin flavored things, pumpkin is a vegetable yet it is always in seasonal items in combination with sweet flavors. To me a pumpkin spice coffee is so strange!

7. CHEERLEADERS

--...dressing up young girls in short skirts and getting them to dance around and cheer on young men strikes me as odd

8. FLAGS

--I work at a summer camp and there is nothing funnier than watching the international counselors be totally weirded out by the flag ceremony we have every morning/evening

9. TAKING COFFEE EVERYWHERE

--Eating/drinking coffee as you go, to me the best part of eating is sitting down, talking, and relaxing

10. BEING OBSESSED WITH YOUR ALMA MATER.

--I know this does not apply to everyone but your attachment to your college/university AFTER you have left. The amount of older people I saw on my trip wearing college gear was insane. As well as supporting your college as an alumni. Coming from the UK where a university is used to gain your degree then its a case of thanks, bye!

--I get made fun of all the time in Russia for having an attachment to my college. They just don't get the idea of loyalty to the school. I think it comes from two places: sports, and a sense of community.

11. ALL THE POMP AND CIRCUMSTANCE SURROUNDING PROM

--I have cousins who live in the US and just hearing about the number of hoops they had to jump through to ask someone to a dance is hilarious.

12. WHITE TEETH MANIA

--Americans are obsessed with straight, white teeth. It's like your entire concept of beauty hangs on it. Don't get me wrong, dental hygiene is important, but not everyone needs a perfect Hollywood smile. They look super fake.

TOP 10 MISTAKES SHORT TERM VOLUNTEERS MAKE

(This comes from input from nationals in over 70 countries... GRENADA INCLUDED!)

YOUR NATIONAL HOSTS ASK THAT YOU **DON'T**:

#10 EXPECT THE LUXURIES YOU ENJOY AT HOME

Our standard of living is not the same.

#9 DEVALUE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF OUR LEADERSHIP

Or act as if the leadership structures and church models you engage in are best for the whole world.

#8 FOCUS ON OUR PROBLEMS / EVIL

First off, there's problems everywhere. But we prefer you focus on our potential, not failings.

#7 BE OBSESSED WITH PICTURE TAKING

It's actually quite embarrassing for us

#6 GIVE GIFTS QUICKLY

Many problems are caused by well meaning, generous people. Our children are especially drawn to your kindness through gift giving, but it builds jealousy and dependence rather than character. Always check with your host before giving even the smallest gift.

#5 GIVE ADVICE QUICKLY (in presentations and conversations)

You will not "revolutionize" us with "cutting edge" principles. We pay attention because we are very courteous and curious about your foreign behavior. We will learn most from those who humbly build long-term relationships with us.

#4 BE CONSUMED WITH ACCOMPLISHING TASKS

We want you to be effective and efficient while you're here. But what is most important is how you compliment the ongoing work and serve those who are living here. On the other hand, don't expect a holiday or vacation— plan to learn, work and serve among us.

#3 THINK WE ARE "BACKWARDS"

Just because our standard of living and cultural ways are different doesn't mean we're "beneath" you.

#2 LET YOUR JOURNEY END WITH THE FLIGHT HOME

We engaged in your life just as much as you engaged in ours. And just as you hope you made a lasting difference in our lives, so we too hope you cherish the impact we made in yours.

#1 BE AN AMERICAN HERO

Don't tell your story (about the trip) in a way that makes it sound like you were the hero rescuing us from ourselves and our backward ways. It's okay to be excited and proud about what you did on your trip BUT you don't have to belittle us in the process.