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Create **peace**,
understanding
and **connections**
between each
other through
traveling!

Being an immersive traveler can be challenging and intimidating. Experiencing sights and sounds you didn't grow up with can be overwhelming. Culture shock can inhibit even the most eager traveler. But fear not, as you learn about people and place, culture shock will be replaced by wonder.

This handbook will inspire and teach you to make the most of your travels through making meaningful interactions with local residents and becoming an immersive traveler.

WHY INTERACT WITH LOCALS

Interacting with local people can take your travel experience to a much deeper and more meaningful level. If you challenge yourself to be tolerant, you will discover hidden treasures other cultures have to offer. Looking back at your own culture and comparing the differences you will question why people do things differently. Learning the answers to "why" is the first step to understanding and appreciating the differences. What follows is often the surprise discovery that we are actually very similar as human-beings.

“ You might hear things at home, but you don't really learn the full truth until you travel.

—Sheri

“ It changes my perspective on what is an acceptable way to live. People in the U.S. demand things as like basic, I need to have this to have a minimum standard quality of life. No you don't, you just think you do because you're used to it.

—Anthony

DEVELOP A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING AND RESPECT FOR ANOTHER'S CULTURE

Every country spreads rumors and stereotypes about other countries. And media, nowadays, likes to use stereotypes to stir up discussions and create prejudices among people. Interacting with locals in your travels gives you the opportunity to break down the prejudices and learn the stories behind them thus turning stereotypes into unique characteristics.

LEARN AND REFLECT MORE ABOUT YOUR OWN CULTURE

Connecting with a new culture and people not only broadens your horizon but also leads you to contemplate your own culture. You will realize that there are actually many ways to do the same thing. It can be challenging but enlightening to find out your culture does not have the best practices. Adopting better practices from other cultures is one of the biggest benefits of travel.

“ Seeing those places where genuinely there’s just good energy and positive people even though they don’t have much which is really interesting and challenging people to re-evaluate what matters.

—Jonas

LEARN UNIVERSAL VALUES THAT HELP YOU BECOME A BETTER PERSON

Living in your home country is comfortable. Traveling can be uncomfortable because of the cultural shock you will experience. Each culture has different values and norms regarding people and behavior. Observing and learning the values and norms of other cultures can help you understand why certain peoples act certain ways. Understanding the differences instead of looking at them as wrong or strange can make your travel experiences more relaxing and rewarding.

“ It’s just like it didn’t seem to matter that we’re from different cultures, like humour brought us together.

—Mallory

LEARN HOW SIMILAR WE ARE AS HUMAN-BEINGS

Whether sharing common interests or just appreciating good food together you can make connections with locals through smiles and eye contact or basic words. These connections can make you feel our similarities as human-beings. We have different passions and preferences for what we eat or what we do to pass the time but we are similar on the fundamental matters of caring for loved ones, seeking pleasure and alleviating pain. So why not lay the small differences aside and get to know one another?

“ The best memory I had in Spain wasn’t Madrid, my favorite memory about Spain was going down to this tiny beach town with this person I randomly met the night before.

—Caitlyn

HAVE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES NOT FOUND ON COMMERCIAL TOURS

Seeing the wonders of the world may be the main reason people travel. They want their picture taken atop Machu Picchu, standing inside the Roman Colosseum or on the Great Wall of China. Being able to say, “Been there, done that” is great, but this can prove to be anticlimactic. What makes an experience stick with you is immersing yourself in time and place, not simply standing atop it. Having locals take you to places they find truly meaningful or having them tell you their stories and relationships with the wonders can make your experiences more memorable and meaningful.

HOW TO FIND INTERACTION OPPORTUNITIES

There are things you can do to take the first step toward meeting people. And once you do, serendipity often moves in to increase and enhance your experiences. Having a flexible itinerary will increase your chances of success. Being open-minded and having a positive attitude can open you up to new experiences that you'll never find on commercial tours.

Access to the internet makes it convenient to connect your interests to local opportunities where you can meet up with locals. Once you take the first step to reach out, opportunities often multiply exponentially. For instance you may go to a pottery class. You may meet a local in the class. They may invite you to see the best pottery store in town. You may accompany them there and find out about an upcoming show of local artists.

UTILIZE EXISTING RESOURCES

There are many mindful companies and organizations today offering unique travel experiences that facilitate travelers interacting with local residents. For example, Airbnb launched their *Experiences* program where local people design and offer travelers Experiences based on their own passions. Travelers can easily book an *Experience* that matches their interests.

(Check out a list of linked experiences and mindful company in the Appendix.)

Finding a local ambassador to show what you're seeing is extremely important, even if you have to hire one. Local guides are extremely helpful especially on explaining stories and customs in a language you understand. For instance, many cities have free walking tours offered in English by local residents. This is a good opportunity to ask questions you may have about the culture.

VISIT FRIENDS OR FAMILY THAT LIVE ABROAD

Do you have friends or relatives who live abroad?! That's a great reason to travel. Not only will you renew friendships or family ties, you will get a free local ambassador who may delight in showing you around and giving you the inside scoop on the significance of what you are seeing. You can also save a lot of money by staying with them so that you can offer to treat them and their friends to a night out. Then you can meet other locals and hear more stories for a better understanding of the culture.

DO SOLO-TRAVELING

Solo traveling forces you to interact with strangers for help or even entertainment. When you travel with a companion you can inadvertently isolate yourselves by talking only to one another. Solo-traveling can make you feel lonely but that is often the impetus to make you want to find people with whom to connect. Solo-traveling also gives you the opportunity to spend time with yourself, learning from and reflecting on the experiences you had with the places and people on your journey. It is also a great opportunity for journaling about your trip through vlogging, writing, or photography.

TRY DIFFERENT KINDS OF TRANSPORTATION

The way you travel can make your experience very different. You can meet many friendly locals when you use their mode of transportation, be it by foot, bus, train, car or boat. Although tour buses might have a guide who gives you explanations of what you're seeing, it can be isolating in that you are with only tourists. It is more like being in a moving library. You are learning about a place but not getting to know the place.

BEING OFF THE BEATEN PATH

Try to stay in a location for several days and experience the normal life there instead of rushing to the sights to check them off your bucket list. Do what locals do, eat what locals eat, stay with locals or in locally-owned lodging. You can learn so much from looking at people's homes, eating their food, and observing their daily activities. For instance, try to stay at bed and breakfasts instead of hotels, go to local markets instead of chain supermarkets, eat at neighborhood restaurants instead of famous restaurants recommended in the guidebook.

MAKE THE EFFORT TO FIND YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Do research beforehand about local festivals or events. Be observant to find those experiences while you're there. Check out posters and advertisements on the street or in the train station. Ask the tourist office for an event calendar or search for a travel bloggers' advice online.

Try to find meetup opportunities based on your interests. By interacting with people who share the same passions as you, you can bond much more easily. It can be interesting to see how similarly or differently each culture approaches the same passion. For example, if you are passionate about dancing, try to find a dance class you can join. Or if you're interested in birds, you can join a local bird watching group for an outing.

HOW TO DEVELOP AND MAINTAIN THE RELATIONSHIPS WITH LOCALS

Learning how to interact with locals is the most important thing immersive travelers can do. Your trip and life will be the beneficiary of the intercultural interactions but keep in mind you are the representative of your culture to those you meet. Make it your mission to act as a peacemaker with the intention to create mutual understanding.

LEARN LOCAL PHRASES

Learn local phrases and challenge yourself to learn not only the essentials but also interesting phrases like, *“You are awesome!”*, *“This tastes so good!”* and *“You are beautiful!”*.

Learn how to say *“excuse me”* and *“thank you”* to make up for an unintentional faux pas so that locals feel you respect them. Use local phrases to express your thankfulness and appreciation of the food or services provided to you. Saying thank you in their language can make locals truly feel you appreciate their help and kindness.

(Check out more interesting phrases to learn in the Appendix.)

SHARE YOUR CULTURE TO CREATE UNDERSTANDING AND DIMINISH PREJUDICE

It’s good to share about your culture with the locals. Be positive and try not to make comments that sound judgemental. They too have stereotypes about other cultures and your stories can help diminish those. Being curious about the people you meet, sharing pictures, asking and answering questions lessens prejudices, dispels fear and promotes understanding between people.

DO RESEARCH ABOUT THE NORMS AND CUSTOMS OF THE CULTURE BEFOREHAND

You don't want to be someone who creates awkward situations or makes a bad impression. As a traveler, you are the representative of your nation. Try to be nice and respectful of the places you are visiting. The concept of time, bargaining and table manners vary across cultures, be observant to determine what the cultural behaviors are while you're there so you won't make the locals feel uncomfortable. For instance in China, you should not stick chopsticks upright in a bowl of rice, because that's a ritual for the dead.

(See the Appendix for a free custom & etiquette guide across cultures.)

BE HELPFUL

Provide help when you can. The locals you encounter often offer you many things. It can be hard to know what to do other than say, "thank you, thank you, thank you." Offer to help with chores or be observant to see what they may need that you can provide.

EXCHANGE CONTACT INFORMATION

Ask for the contact information of the locals you encounter on your journey. Get their address, phone number, facebook or email and make contact with them when you get home. Sending them letters, gifts or postcards can really make them feel you care about them and appreciate the help or hospitality they gave you during your travels. You may even create a life-long friendship with them.

REVISIT OR GIVE AN INVITATION

Rather than always traveling to new destinations. Consider returning to a place where you had a meaningful connection and rekindle the friendship. It can feel like a homecoming and be an even richer experience the second time around. You can even go back as a volunteer for a local charity or to help your friend with an event or project they are planning. Don't forget to invite your new friends to come visit you in your home country. You may be pleasantly surprised by them taking you up on the invitation.

OVERCOME LANGUAGE BARRIERS

The language barrier is the most challenging issue travelers face in their interactions with locals. However, there are many ways you can connect without speaking the same language. Using non-verbal communications like body language, eye contact, drawing or just having the right attitude can make interactions more fun and memorable! You can always use Google Translate to help you get your message across. The connections you make with the locals may inspire you to learn their language so you get to communicate with them on a deeper level.

BE OPEN-MINDED, TRY NOT TO SET PREDETERMINED EXPECTATIONS

Be open-minded and flexible to try new things. Leave your expectations behind. Having too many expectations and restrictions will keep you from immersing into the culture. Other countries have different standards and ways to do things. Keep in mind your country does not have the "right" culture, it's just one of the many cultures on this planet. For instance, changing your eating habits while you travel may give you fresh perspectives on food.

APPENDIX

UNIQUE OPPORTUNITIES

- **Wolf Encounter** in Anacortes, USA
- **Hunger Game Tour** in Taipei, Taiwan
- Constructing **Smokeless Oven** in Vicos, Peru
- Experience first-hand **Organic Farming** in Togo
- Free **Homestay Experience** in Chile
- **Tutor English** to a family in France
- **See the Sunrise** in the Atlas Mountains in Morocco
- **Vegetarian Food Tour** led by Young Female Students in Vietnam
- **Vinyl Listening Experience** at the foot of the mountains in Meinong, Taiwan
- **Stay with a rural family** for free in exchange for your help with their hospitality business in New Zealand

CUSTOMS AND ETIQUETTE GUIDE

Learn the customs and etiquette of countries through this free guide by *Commisceo Global*.

Visit <https://www.commisceo-global.com/resources/country-guides>

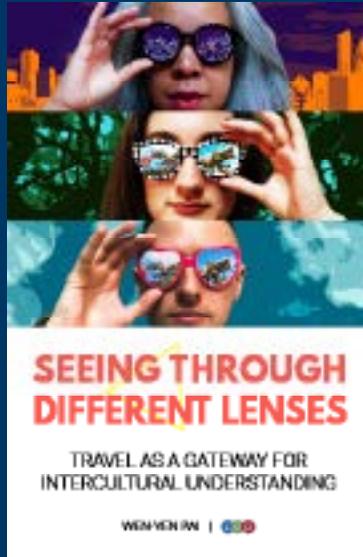
INTERESTING PHRASES TO LEARN

- “ You are awesome!
- “ You are beautiful/handsome!
- “ Thank you very much!
- “ This food(drink) tastes so good!
- “ Where is your favorite restaurant?
- “ So cute!
- “ Nice to meet you!
- “ This is amazing!
- “ Nice to meet you!
- “ What’s your name?
- “ This is too expensive!
(If the country you are visiting has bargain culture)

MINDFUL COMPANY LIST

- [WWOOF](#)
- [Servas](#)
- [nearify](#)
- [Helpx.net](#)
- [Airbnb](#)
- [Meetup](#)
- [Couchsurfing](#)
- [Homestay.com](#)
- [Travel Pal](#)
- [Crooked Trails](#)
- [showaround](#)
- [Facebook Group](#)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



This handbook is the product of Wen-Yen Pai's capstone project—*Seeing through Different Lenses: Travel as a Gateway for Intercultural Understanding*.

The information and resources in the handbook are inspired from the interviews, surveys and a case study conducted for the capstone project. For more information about the project, please visit www.wenypai.com

THIS HANDBOOK COULD NOT HAVE BEEN CREATED WITHOUT THESE WONDERFUL PEOPLE.

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““ Food is a big thing for us, that’s how we connect with people around the world.
—Amanda

““ I was humbled that there are millions of people on this side of the world that think completely different than we do.
—Tani-Rae

““ One of the ways I’ve had the best experiences traveling is not having any plans at all, just know where i’m going, a place to stay.
—Kat

““ When you leave your country, you see it from another perspective, you learn more about it by leaving your country than you do by being in it.
—Stefanie

““ I mean it’s cool to see like really beautiful palaces, but after my travels, my memory when I think of India, is all about the people that I’ve met.
—Adam

““ I put in the effort to connect with the people and make sure that my travel experience isn’t a selfish one.
—Isabelle

““ I think each person being open like that will ultimately translate to countries being open with each other, it’s probably more important now than ever.
—Jonas

““ Living with a host family is always a good way to get a new perspective on our own privilege. It’s also a good reminder that although things may look very different on the surface, there’s a lot that we have in common and there are always chances to connect around those commonalities rather than staying focused on differences as “strange.”
—Laura

““ I don’t think you are even traveling unless you talk to people, listen to people. If you go somewhere and don’t talk to anybody, and you don’t listen to other ppl to tell you their world, to share their lives and existence, you’re not actually traveling, you’re not going anywhere because you’re stuck in your head, your own set of understanding you brought with you wherever you came from.
—Nathan

““ I have learned that we also have a lot of cultural events and stories but often we forget and don’t take time to cultivate them nor do we spend time in reading history books. After my travel I wanted to learn more about cultural things in my home country.
—Francesca

““ Giving yourself the time to meet locals and being open to new experiences, I think is the most valuable thing I’ve ever done while traveling.
—Caitlyn

““ Our culture is not the only one with good ideas. We do not have a monopoly on the right way to do things.
—Ben

““ Give respect, love, and try to understand their culture and you will receive it back in spades.
—Larry

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CHANGE THE WORLD

