

How Much Do You Know About Your Host Country?

The questions below can serve as a guide to exploring your host country in greater depth. In attempting to answer these questions, many more may be suggested. Nevertheless, when you have the answers to these, you will be well beyond the beginner stage. Write down the answers to as many as you can, then return to the list periodically as both a guide and a check on your progress.

1. How many people who are prominent in the affairs (politics, athletics, religion, the arts, etc.) of your host country can you name?
2. Who are the country's national heroes and heroines?
3. Can you recognize the national anthem?
4. Are other languages spoken besides the dominant language? What are the social and political implications of language usage?
5. What is the predominant religion? Is it a state religion? Have you read any of its sacred writings?
6. What are the most important religious observances and ceremonies? How regularly do people participate in them?
7. How do members of the predominant religion feel about other religions?
8. What are the most common forms of marriage ceremonies and celebrations?
9. What is the attitude toward divorce? Extra-marital relations? Plural relations?
10. What is the attitude toward gambling?
11. What is the attitude toward drinking?
12. Is the price asked for merchandise fixed, or are customers expected to bargain? How is the bargaining conducted?
13. If, as a customer, you touch or handle merchandise for sale, will the storekeeper think you are knowledgeable, inconsiderate, within your rights, completely outside your rights? Other?
14. How do people organize their daily activities? What is the normal meal schedule? Is there a daytime rest period? What is the customary time for visiting friends?
15. What foods are most popular and how are they prepared?
16. What things are taboo in this society?
17. What is the usual dress for women? For men? Are slacks or shorts worn? If so, on what occasions? Do teenagers wear jeans?
18. Do hairdressers use techniques similar to those used by hairdressers in the United States? How much time do you need to allow for an appointment at the hairdresser?
19. What are the special privileges of age and/or sex?
20. If you are invited to dinner, should you arrive early? On time? Late? If late, how late?
21. On what occasions would you present (or accept) gifts from people in the country? What kinds of gifts would you exchange?

22. Do some flowers have a particular significance?
23. How do people greet one another? Shake hands? Embrace or kiss? How do they leave one another? What does any variation from the usual greeting or leave-taking signify?
24. If you are invited to a cocktail party, would you expect to find among the guests: foreign business people, men only, men and women, etc.?
25. What are the important holidays? How is each observed?
26. What are the favorite leisure and recreational activities of adults? Teenagers?
27. What sports are popular?
28. What kinds of television programs are shown? What social purposes do they serve?
29. What is the normal work schedule? How does it accommodate environmental or other conditions?
30. How will your financial position and living conditions compare with those of the majority of people living in this country?
31. What games do children play? Where do children congregate?
32. How are children disciplined at home?
33. Are children usually present at social occasions? At ceremonial occasions? If they are not present, how are they cared for in the absence of their parents?
34. How does this society observe children's "coming of age"?
35. What kind of local public transportation is available? Do all classes of people use it?
36. Who has the right of way in traffic: vehicles, animals, pedestrians?
37. Is military training compulsory?
38. Are the largest circulation newspapers generally friendly in their attitude toward the United States?
39. What is the history of the relationships between this country and the United States?
40. How many people have emigrated from this country to the United States? Other countries? Are many doing so at present?
41. Are there many American expatriates living in this country?
42. What kinds of options do foreigners have in choosing a place to live?
43. What kinds of health services are available? Where are they located?
44. What are the common home remedies for minor ailments? Where can medicines be purchased?
45. Is education free? Compulsory?
46. In schools, are children segregated by race? By caste? Or class? By sex?

47. What kinds of schools are considered best: public, private, parochial?

48. In schools, how important is learning by rote?

49. How are children disciplined in schools?

50. Where are the important universities of the country? If university education is sought abroad, to what countries and universities do students go?

Taken from: Survival Kit for Overseas Living, by L. Robert Kohls. Intercultural Press, 1984.