

LINE ON LIFE

3/26/86

Avoid Vacation Disappointments *

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Millions of people from the United States travel to other countries each year. Most of them enjoy their trips. However, some of them are disappointed. How can you reduce your chances of being disappointed when taking a trip?

Although many people envision traveling to different continents, the same travel tips also apply to visiting just across the border in Mexico or Canada.

First, **don't hold unrealistic expectations**. In most travel folders, the romantic image of foreign countries has a fairytale quality. However, no country is like Disneyland, where a large and energetic staff rapidly sweeps up every scrap of debris almost as it drops. Whether a city is American or foreign, very few cities that have many tourists are litter free. This, if a foreign city is not as clean as you want it to be, don't let this upset you.

Second, **remember that you are not the first tourist to come to that city**. Sometimes local residents – at least those who are not making earnings from your visit – seem less than enthusiastic about your presence. This is probably because you are only a drop in a flood of tourists that have washed through their city. If they don't walk up and shake your hand on the street, be thankful that they are not antagonistic.

Third, **don't be offended by presumed snubs** from clerks in hotels, cafes and other places frequented by tourists. It is tedious work to deal with foreign tourists – especially when most of them do not speak the language. This is made even worse if there are many tourists around at once. You need to realize that travels can get irritable brushoffs just as easily in the United States.

Fourth, **don't let the traffic dismay you**. Traffic in many foreign countries seems to be chaotic, and the drivers seem to be wilder. As you dodge your way across the street, don't emphasize the inconvenience and potential danger. Accept the traffic's inevitability. Look on the frantic driving style as one of those curious foreign customs that you left home to see for yourself.

Fifth, **observe differences, but don't make comparisons**. Nothing is ever as good as home. However, you left home behind to see another part of the world. People do things differently in other countries. In some countries, they prefer not to stand in lines. If an interloper shoves ahead of you, don't gripe about proper etiquette – adapt to the situation. The incident will make a funny story to tell the friends back home.

Sixth, **don't make snap judgments**. Give yourself time to adapt to a new city or country. Cities are like people – they have hidden qualities that take time to uncover. Linger a while in just a few places rather than trying to see everything in a couple of weeks.

Seventh, **remember that sightseeing can be hard work**. Pace yourself. Don't try to see every notable attraction described in the guidebook. Instead, select a few that appeal to you the most. Save adequate time to relax (away from traffic) in a city park or sidewalk cafe. Relax, watch the people or even read a good book. Don't regret skipping an important attraction.

Eighth, **learn some of the language**. You cannot learn the whole language before you take a trip. However, you can learn a few key phrases before you travel to another country. Not only does it make it more fun for you as a traveler, it makes the natives more receptive to you.

Ninth, **travel light**. It is very likely that you will want to bring things back with you, so it is better to have extra luggage space. As a rule of thumb – if luggage has to be *forced* shut, it is too full.

To summarize, there is an art to traveling and enjoying yourself. When you invest time, money and emotion in a trip, you are the one who loses if you let inconveniences get the best of you. Whether or not a city or country pleases you, there is no way you are going to get your money – or your time – back.

You can even take this one step further. We are all on a lifetime trip. As with any trip, there are many inconveniences. Those who keep going over and over past inconveniences take the joy out of life. As with a vacation trip, don't let the inconveniences get the best of you. **Savor the joys of your lifetime**.

* Adapted from James Yenckel's article in the *Washington Post* on August 11, 1985.