How to Survive Traveling With Others

Stress

Learn about your travel companions. Discuss what things they anticipate will be the hardest for them. What kind of stressors have pushed them over their limit in the past. What do they do to avoid that from happening? What helps them get back on track when they're suffering anxiety? Anticipate these triggers for your travel companions and intervene in the ways they have identified as helpful to avoid to counteract the stress. Shoulder each other's burdens and support each other with compassion.

Expectations

Learn about each other's expectations. Some people naturally want to fly fast and see everything, while other would rather see a few things at a slower pace. Some people prioritize art and history while others want to savor a coffee lingering at a Parisian café for hours. Both are learners. Find your common ground before the trip. Check in with each other often during the trip to see how you're doing at finding balance.

Influence

Take turns planning ahead. Before the trip allow everyone to suggest their priorities. This is important, take a moment before you head out each day to look into their eyes and confirm what you have prioritized for that day, at least a rough outline. Don't let yourself get stuck with no meal plans, grumpy bellies lead to grumpy hearts. Accept each other's influence — every day. As the day unfolds be intentional to accept a suggestion from each person. Not only because it will increase your bond, but most importantly it will make the trip more enjoyable for everyone.

Independence

Build into your plans some time for individuals to do their own thing. Why? Because we're all different, and some of us are introverts. Whether your need is calm, or crowds either way this time is for you. Take a half day and do something that exploits your quirky uniqueness. If you are an extrovert, sign up for a guided tour and revel in the bliss of making fifty new best friends. Time apart will give you great stories to share when you get back together, and increase your bond.

Fight nice

Don't be afraid of conflict. Healthy relationships are built on reconciliation after disagreements. Practice these four principles when you find yourself in a disagreement. 1.) Ease into the discussion with gentle tone and genuine curiosity. Express a positive need in your life or your group, and allow them to connect the dots. 2.) Appreciate your companion's positive qualities and express gratitude. 3.) Accept your companion's perspective, it is different from your own, but it is valid. Apologize for any hurt they feel, acknowledge this was not your intent. No excuses, move on. 4.) Spend time making positive memories doing something soothing and fun.

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Choose your battles wisely

Practice listening to people with the intent of discovering more about them, not talking more about you. “We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus Lord,” (2 Corinthians 4:5). Remember that throughout the conversation it is not your goal that they agree with your personal values, but that they are empowered to be themselves as God created them or even grow in their personal relationship with God.

Separations

Say good goodbyes. Healthy closure paves the way for healthy hellos in Paris, and likewise it promotes continuing healthy relationships during your stay abroad.

There may be things you will mourn the absence of, while you are abroad. Prepare yourself for separations, even short ones.

Change is good

Try not to compare your host culture with your home culture. Respect things you do not understand. Everything is intentional and has a purpose in their society.

Don’t say, “It’s weird.” Learn to say, “It’s different.”

Adaptation

Cultural adaptation is something everyone has to approach at their own pace. Some transitions will be harder for different people, so you may find you are adapting in different ways. Allow your companions to determine their own level of integration. Banish all guilt trips, fear, or prodding. Just be yourself and embrace your new identity with gusto. Release all expectations that others adapt the same way as you.

Am I a missionary?

If you believe we are all sent ones, near and far, then you’ll see every interaction as an opportunity to share the good news. Interact with French people as much as possible; ask them who they say Jesus is. Then listen with wide eyed wonder. Work on really listening to the content and not getting distracted by creating a rebuttal in your head. Be gentle, remember, they have never heard the truth. Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit.