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Cultural considerations

Why do I need to understand cultural backgrounds when targeting the international market?

What are the key cultural considerations?

How should I tailor my message?

The world is full of differences and we need to understand them.

Cultural background greatly influences the way we communicate with the international market, and the way an international traveller experiences your product. International travellers often visit the same attractions but they may each take something completely different out of the experience.

For example, an Asian visitor may visit Stratford-upon-Avon to see the buildings and have their picture taken, but an American visitor may want to experience a Royal Shakespeare Company performance as part of their visit.

Cultural background also drives the types of tours, activities, food and accommodation requested by international travellers during their stay in England. A Dutch tourist may travel over in his own car and visit remote locations. An American couple may request a twin room with two queen beds. A Chinese group may express a desire for certain foods during a tour.

“During my time in China and listening to many operators we very quickly realised that the visitors were really excited by the country house experience. Due to our unique vantage point and location so close to Windsor and Highclere, we wanted to create programmes that would fulfil the visitors’ expectations. Our programmes enable the visitor to step back in time as they are greeted by actors depicting the butler, housekeeper and so on. To fully embrace the experience visitors can dress up in vintage clothing, Take afternoon tea within the historic halls, closely followed by activity on the lawns, duck herding is a favourite.”

Hon William Stonor, Stonor Park



What are the key cultural considerations?

For each international market you need to consider the following aspects or categories in relation to how they will interact with your product, and how you need to present your product to them. Whilst these may change with age range or generation within each market, an example of each consideration is provided.

Consider	Impact	For example
Religion	Can affect food, dress and activities	Sensitivities around appropriate dress e.g. beach photos with women in bikinis would not be appropriate in a brochure targeting certain markets.
Politics	Can impact what and how you promote	Some governments ban the open promotion of casinos and gambling e.g. China.
Food and dining	Can impact what you need to provide	Vegetarian, Jain, Halal, Kosher etc. For Chinese culture, dining is a shared experience, loud and convivial, large shared dishes are more popular than individually-ordered meals.
Pace	Needs to be faster for some visitors	Eastern Market visitors traditionally enjoy a faster pace of travel than Western Hemisphere markets.
Punctuality	Needs to be reinforced for some markets	Some markets, such as India, are known for taking things at their own pace. The German market, however is very punctual and likes others to be.
Timing	Need to consider if your target market traditionally starts early or late in the day or likes to stay out late	Think of whether they eat earlier, later or around the same time as England, and how long they like to take to enjoy their meal. For example, Mediterranean countries tend to eat their evening meal a lot later and take a lot more time than other markets.
Language	Can impact all components but especially be conscious of safety messages	Consider translation of all safety advice such as the use of life jackets, swimming, fire regulations etc.
Sensitivities	Need to be aware of any cultural sensitivities such as nudity and alcohol	Mormons, Muslims and Jain will traditionally not drink alcohol.
Superstition	Need to be aware of any superstitions that impact the traveller.	Chinese have sensitivities around colour and numbers – the numbers 4 and 13 are considered to be unlucky.

Tailor your message

Once you have reviewed the cultural considerations for each of your target markets, you then need to ensure that this translates into your marketing and also your day to day operations. How the visitor engages with your product, and how comfortable they feel, will ultimately define their experience.

At all times be open and honest about what the visitor may experience, for example, stating that alcohol will be served at a touring lunch stop pre-warns the visitor and also allows them to feel comfortable in refusing or approaching the guide about it should they have any concerns.

When conducting a sales call or trade show appointment, tailor your message to appeal to the different markets and respect their culture. The quality of your tailored communications is critical to being successful. For example, when handing your business card to a Chinese market client the exchange should always be done so with two hands as a sign of respect. Chinese business cards represent the person to whom you are being introduced, so it is polite to study the card for a while and then put it on the table next to you or in your business card case (don't staple it in a book).





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