



TOURISM FOR A BETTER WORLD

## Communication Skills - Intercultural Learning and Understanding

### Fostering Intercultural Learning and Understanding

#### Intercultural Awareness and Understanding

**Intercultural understanding** ignites people's interest in the lives of others. It encourages individuals to connect their own world with that of others in a non-judgmental way, fostering **empathy and respect** for both their own culture and the cultures they encounter.

#### Levels of Intercultural Understanding

- **Unaware:** People at this stage don't realize there are ways of doing things different from their own.
- **Aware:** People are conscious of different behaviors but still believe their own way is the most appropriate.
- **Unsure:** People are uncertain about different behaviors but are open-minded and willing to reconcile varying approaches.
- **Creating:** People actively integrate different perspectives and behaviors, forging a new, shared understanding through respect and empathy.

#### Intercultural Understanding and Learning in Visitor Guiding

I find the following question incredibly important. Can you answer it and complete the short sentences?

#### What is the role of the visitor guide in terms of intercultural understanding?

1. **Visitor Guides** are **Cultural Mediators**.
2. **Visitor guides** help guests to understand the culture of the host country.

3. **Visitor guides** are aware of the group's cultural background.
4. **Visitor guides** consider the intercultural challenges or "traps" their participants might encounter.

### Steps to Facilitate Intercultural Understanding in Tour Groups

**Visitor guides** facilitate discussions that empower participants to discover, understand, and reflect on intercultural differences. This offers them the opportunity to gain valuable intercultural learning experiences, which often involve emotional processes.

In my view, two aspects play a major role in this process:

#### Recognizing Culture and Developing Respect

- **Critically review your own cultural lens:** Examine the views, beliefs, assumptions, and values from your own culture. Understand how they shape your perceptions.
- **Cultivate interest and non-judgment:** Be curious about the differences between your own culture (e.g., Your country's culture) and the host culture (if you're guiding abroad, or simply different cultures within Your country). Actively seek information, ask clarifying questions, and bridge any language gaps.
- **Question assumptions about the host culture:** Recognizing and accepting differences is fundamental to "international understanding." Aim to paint the most realistic picture possible of both your own country and the foreign country or culture being visited.

#### Interacting and Empathizing with Others

- **Develop empathy and take responsibility:** Promoting empathy means you learn to better "understand" the country you are traveling to, its system, and its people – with both your head and your heart!
- **Engage in intercultural learning:** This involves gaining insight, benefiting from exchanging views and experiences from both sides, reflecting on intercultural experiences, and taking personal responsibility for fostering understanding.

What's one specific example of a cultural difference you've encountered on a tour (either as a guide or a traveler) that required intercultural understanding to navigate?

### Practical Tips for Enhancing Intercultural Understanding on Tour

As **visitor guides** in Your country, we have many ways to foster **intercultural understanding** within our tour groups. This includes, for instance, avoiding "I" statements and instead using "why" questions to encourage reflection on cultural norms and values. Here are more tips for you:

#### Creating Intercultural Situations

Facilitate "intercultural situations" that offer authentic, "real" impressions of daily life. For example:

- **Take public transport:** A trip on a local "matatu" (minibus) or a boda-boda (motorcycle taxi) provides vastly different impressions than traveling by private coach, immersing guests in the local rhythm.
- **Facilitate discussions with locals:** Encourage conversations with local **visitor guides** about everyday topics they both know and are interested in, such as sports, music, or family life.
- **Engage with passers-by:** Encourage polite conversations and inquiries with people on the street to gather interesting daily life information.
- **Dine at local restaurants:** Encourage guests to experience local eateries. This allows for a sensory examination of their own tasting and eating habits compared to Your country's cuisine.
- **Shop at local markets:** Encourage guests to buy typical groceries and souvenirs at local markets. This lets travelers immerse themselves in the hustle and bustle and engage all their senses.
- **Provide free time:** Offer individual travelers discreet free time to "immerse" themselves in the everyday world and absorb impressions.

### Conversational Techniques

Use these conversational techniques to foster deeper understanding:

- **Create relaxed situations:** Hold conversations about past experiences or general aspects of Your country in relaxed settings, such as a café at a bustling market square, a short walk, or during program breaks in attractive locations.
- **Use questioning techniques:** Asking, "... and how is it at home?" often generates more participation and reflection than simply having guests listen or explaining something.
- **Bridge "international comparability" gaps:** Explain cultural nuances to remove as many inhibitions as possible. Support your explanations with informative materials if available.
- **Involve local participants:** If a participant is originally from Your country but now lives elsewhere (e.g., Germany), include them as "mediators between cultures." This adds authenticity and can assist with translations, enriching the group's experience.

### Translation Techniques

If participants don't speak the local language, use these translation techniques:

- **Use concise and simple language:** Avoid long, complicated phrases and passages.

- **Allow "digestion times":** Give guests small pauses to process information, allowing more space for thought and for you to add brief comments.
- **Ask for clarity:** Always ask if anything is unclear.
- **Summarize "intermediate translations":** Briefly summarize discussions that require translation to avoid losing too much time and to keep everyone updated.
- **Distribute translating responsibility:** If possible, encourage other participants who know the language to assist with translation, fostering a sense of shared effort within the group.

### Mediating "Intercultural Conflicts"

When "intercultural conflicts" arise, handle them diplomatically:

- **Don't take comments personally.**
- **Foster balance and good relationships** within the group from the outset.
- **Emphasize your role as a guide:** For some guests, explaining local conditions might be perceived as "siding with the foreigners." Stress your role as a **facilitator, mediator, and representative of the foreign culture**, rather than an individual expressing personal views.
- **Explain cultural backgrounds:** Refer to cultural backgrounds and customs, taking the other person's cultural context into consideration, and avoid stereotypes.
- **Be a good listener:** Be sensitive and take other perspectives seriously. Create an environment where everyone feels comfortable speaking equally and respectfully.

### Scenario: An Inappropriate Comment

A group of Norwegian holidaymakers has just arrived by plane. During the coach ride to the hotel, the guests look out of the window. A traveler notices a road construction worker resting in the shade and makes a comment.

Which of these responses would be more appropriate for a **visitor guide**?

1. "Quite the opposite, actually. The workers here often work up to 12 hours a day, and that's in this heat. They likely take short, vital breaks to cope with the strenuous conditions."
2. "Yes, you are right. The workers here are really lazy. You should get out and tell them that clearly."

You have successfully completed the third learning unit of the course "Digital **Visitor Guiding**." I look forward to seeing you again in the next learning unit!