

Activities to prepare for Visits Abroad



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One aspect in our preparations for a visit abroad which is often forgotten is the preparation of those who taking part. All of the technical aspects are well covered and many have expertise in making travel plans, bookings and arranging programmes. However, all this is in vain if the experience is not a fulfilling one for all those taking part.

Activity 1 – Why are we going?

A short time after taking the decision on where you are going, and allowing time for the participants to have given some thought about the whole experience, carry out the following exercise. It should be done before programme planning takes place so that the results of the activity can be absorbed into the final plans.

Use brightly coloured paper and make a mock-up of a travel ticket, putting the name of the place you are travelling to in the middle. Then working in small groups, each participant chats to his or her friends about their expectations from the trip. These are written randomly around the destination. When the small group has completed this exercise, each person must select their top three expectations, making them with a highlighting pen or circling them. Everyone then displays their travel tickets on a wall and spends a little time looking at what everyone's expectations are. Spend some time listing the most commonly listed expectations.

Some pointers:

- Are there expectations which surprise you? You didn't realise that someone had a particular skill or interest. Use this to make that person a key player in exploring the possibilities around that skill while you are abroad.

- Look out for expectations which are negative, such as 'There won't be any food that I like?', 'I don't understand the money so I'll get ripped off' or 'I've heard that tourists are attacked.'
- How are you going to incorporate these fears into your preparations?
- Look out for expectations which are beyond reach, such as 'I expect that we will be meeting the President of the country,' or 'We will be able to go to theme parks every day.'
- How will you incorporate these expectations into your preparations?

One simple way of covering some of the expectations is to ensure that the young people are involved in the planning right from the start. Reaching compromises, recognising what is possible and buying into the final programme is much easier to achieve if everyone has been involved in the decision making.

For some of the negative expectations – try to address these in the planning process. For example, try cooking some traditional dishes from the country you are visiting. See who can create the best meal using local ingredients. Get someone who knows about cooking to give an interactive display of cooking in the style of the country.

Activity 2 - Challenging stereotypes

Prepare a list of countries before you begin the activity. Prepare this carefully to include the country you are visiting, far-away countries, those with different cultural and religious identities to

ours, those which have recently been in the news. A list of about 10 or 12 is long enough.

The young people can be in small groups or may complete the first stage on their own. The leaders out the first names country and each person, or group, has to put down the first few words that come into their minds. Allow a minute or so to allow for those who might find it difficult.

Then go through the list and chart the range of words for each country.

Then allocate one of the original country names to individuals or small groups and ask them to reverse the process and, imagining that they are from the nominate country, what their initial impressions are of the UK. Chart these results.

Using the results of both sessions, highlight the influences on our feelings – media, our own religion, whether we have travelled abroad, friendships in the various countries, bad experiences etc.

How do the young people feel about the image they think is portrayed by 'Brits Abroad'?

Use this exercise to prepare a code of conduct – drafted and agreed to by all the young people – so that they act as goodwill ambassadors rather than hooligans!

Activity 3 - Raffa-Raffa / Baffa-Baffa

This activity goes by many names and may have been played in different formats.

The basic scenario is two or three groups are established with three distinct cultural identities, represented by various behaviours and actions. Prior to the game draw up a list of characteristics. Here are some examples:

- Touch – Group 1 likes to touch hands, Group 2 dislikes all contact with outsiders, Group 3 likes contact with outsiders but not contact with their own group
- Head – Group 1 nods head to signify agreement, Group 2 shakes head for agreement, Group 3 taps head with hand for agreement

- Greeting – Group 1 shakes with left hand, Group 2 is deeply offended if left hand is used, Group 3 likes shaking hands and doesn't care with which
- Requesting information – Group one elevates the forefinger, Group 2 opens palm, Group 3 shakes fist
- Counting – Groups 1 uses binary, Group 2 uses decimal system, Group 3 stamps the left foot only.

Develop a few more reactions, actions, behaviours following the pattern above. These become the characteristics of each of the 'Communities'. Distribute a list of the characteristics to each of the three groups and allow them time to get used to the how they will react/behaviour.

Then set a task for all the Communities. This should be simple, such as find out the ages of the members of the other groups. You may not communicate in English or any foreign language written or spoken, after the instructions have been distributed.

Allocate sufficient time for the game to develop and to debrief and come out of role at the end. This is essential to ensure that everyone realises that the game is over, their colleagues were just playing a role and that normal life can be resumed.

Such a role-play can be a powerful way of how people feel when they are in a totally different environment, when common behaviours take on a totally different meaning. In the debrief, allow everyone to discuss how they felt, how they coped with the new rules of interaction, how this game could be like a coming international experience.

The Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council CYEC has an activity pack - **Crossing Frontiers** – costing £10, which is packed with lots of ideas on preparing for a trip abroad.

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