A Toolbox of Activities

Increasing Cultural Awareness in Short-Term Customized Programs

Simple activities can increase cultural awareness even in short-term programs. Below is a list of some activities to be implemented pre-departure, on-site, and upon return. In no way is this list exhaustive or is it comprised of rigid rules for activities; feel free to adapt them to your needs.

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Pre-departure

Six times Three: Subjective Adjectives  
Step 1: Write six adjectives describing own culture.  
Step 2: Write six adjectives describing target culture.  
Step 3: Write six adjectives target culture would use to describe home culture.  
Goals: Talk about stereotypes; reflect on home culture, prepare for how host culture might perceive students.

Headline news:  
Have students find three news sources from the host city/country. E.g. Chinadaily.com.cn. Students read top headlines for four consecutive days including local, national and international. (Language activity variation: have students read the news in the target language).  
Goals: Preparation for important local news topics, language acquisition.

Interviews:  
Have students interview international students on home campus from target country/culture.  
Goals: help students see international aspects on home campus, preparation for host culture.
Cultural Blueprint: Students imagine international students coming to their hometown for 3 weeks. What do students suggest they do, see, eat, experience to learn the most of home culture? **Goals:** Reflect on U.S. values, create blueprint for their own international experience.

**Watch Your Step:** Take public transportation to move the group around instead of private buses. Walk whenever possible with a local guide to point out everyday differences. **Goals:** move around like locals, increase cultural exposure.

**Cultural Credit Card:** Students get X amount of local currency to use independently to participate in cultural activities of their choice (within guidelines). **Goals:** Encourages integration while students have free time.

**Cultural Encounters:** Activities that students can do alone or in small groups. One example is having students go food shopping at a local open-air market and a supermarket to compare and contrast how people shop in those places and how they shop in home culture, learn new vocabulary words for food. **Goals:** interaction with locals, overcoming challenge, language acquisition.

**Cultural Exposure:** Photojournalism assignment. Students take photos of differences they notice in the host culture. For example, store hours that close for the “siesta.” **Goals:** Encourages students to interact with new culture and take meaningful photos not just touristic pictures. Later, they can tell their story through these photos.

**Headline news II:** Have students read news sources in the host city/country. E.g. Prague Post in English. (Language activity variation: have students read the news in the target language). **Goals:** Get students up-to-date on current issues affecting host culture, language acquisition.

**Interviews II:** Have students interview local students, pub owners, families, etc. on specific topics. **Goals:** interact with “locals”, language acquisition. (Guest speakers can also work for this activity)

**Re-entry Activities**

**Your Time Capsule:** Students assemble defining elements of what they’ve learned and experienced, e.g. physical items, photos, letters home, music, etc. **Goals:** storytelling and reflecting on experience.

**20–20 Vision:** Students prepare a presentation of 20 slides each shown for 20 seconds that tell the story of their experience. **Goals:** Encouraging deeper reflection on cultural experience by choosing most meaningful photos.