

# The Employee Hitchhiker's Guide to the Cultures

Employees of Disalvo Corporation: *Don't Panic*

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October 29, 2013

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# 1

## Introduction

The advancements in technology in the last century have enabled a marketplace beyond what has existed in the past. While previous generations could focus on a single country and its culture, we need to go beyond our borders.

As members of this company, Disalvo Corporation, we need all our members to setup to this global marketplace. We need to execute sales, make deals, and help the world.

The purpose of this report is to enable every single member of our workforce to travel to a foreign culture and succeed. To succeed, we will present different cultures from different countries and discuss them. The topics discussed will include the most essential items for success. The topics are basic communication, social and work norms, and dining etiquette.

We have searched far and wide to present to you the best possible information. We have scoured the web, read books, talked to residents, and even visited some of the countries ourselves to better learn about the countries.

With these skills mastered, you will be in the best possible position when traveling abroad. Buckle your seat belts, put your tray table up, and remember, *Don't panic*.

## List of Countries

The countries that we have selected represent the type of global strategy that we are trying to achieve. We have picked a country from each continent that we wish to do business. Spanning multiple continents will allow you to get a glimpse of diversity in the world. The countries that

we have selected are Brazil, Russia, and South Africa.

## 2

# Brazil

Brazil is a very dynamic culture. The diversity in Brazil stems from its history of colonization. Originally, Brazil was a Portuguese colony. The heavy demand for sugar led to many Africans being bought and used as slave labor. The indigenous people were also enslaved and forced to produce sugar from sugar cane. In 1803, the Portuguese royal family fled to Brazil and created an independent country (Kagan et al., 2010, pg. 614). On October 5, 1988, Brazil drafted and signed a constitution creating a federal republic (World Factbook, 2013). Brazil will continue to be an important part of the world economy and understanding the culture will lead to successful business ventures.

## Communication

Understanding how to communicate with Brazilians will help you succeed in your business ventures in Brazil. Portuguese is the most commonly spoken language of Brazil. Speaking Spanish to Brazilians can be taken as an insult, as most Brazilians are proud of their native language. Most of the upper management of Brazilian companies and educated individuals will be fluent in English (Herrington, 2001, pg. 62). However it is most likely a good idea to have a translator present just to understand side conversations. It may be a good idea to bring along your own translator. Translators are very expensive if you hire one in Brazil. Non-verbal communication is very important in Brazil and you must be aware of some gestures and what they mean.

Brazil, like many other cultures, has their own set of non-verbal communication gestures. The

gesture to remember is to never give the OK sign with your thumb and index finger as it means asshole (Herrington, 2001, pg. 76). Another gesture that is inappropriate would be to slam your fist into your palm because it has a sexual connotation (Herrington, 2001, pg. 76). Very much like the United States shrugging your shoulders, shaking your head and nodding all have the same meanings in Brazil. Brazilians like to speak with one another at a much closer distance than you may be used to. This may make you uncomfortable, but if you back up the person you are talking to will most likely step forward. Typically, Brazilians will be very physical with one another. They will often touch each other throughout the conversation. This is not seen as flirtatious, it is just how they communicate with one another. Understanding the social and work norms of Brazil is just as important as communication.

## **Social & Work Norms**

There are many important things to remember when attending meetings with Brazilians. Titles are very important in the business culture of Brazil. It is imperative that you know the titles of the people you are meeting. A companys chief executive is usually called the Presidente, Diretor superintendente is equivalent to a managing director or vice president of a division (Herrington, 2001, pg. 75). Anyone with a college degree of any kind is referred to as Douctor or Doutora (Herrington, 2001, pg. 75). When you first arrive at the meeting it is a custom to shake everyones hand that is attending the meeting. Knowing and using the titles will help you appear professional. Dressing for the occasion will make you look professional.

Professional dress in Brazil is very much like the United States. A suit and tie are very common for men and women (Herrington, 2001, pg. 81). The one thing you shouldnt wear are shorts, they are taboo for work attire and are usually only found at the beach (Herrington, 2001, pg. 81). Shoes are important as they are one of Brazils biggest industries (World Factbook, 2013). You should ensure that your shoes are in good condition and if possible Brazilian shoes would be an added bonus. Understanding the social norms of Brazil will help prepare you for what to experience outside the professional world.

The beach, soccer, and bars are very integrated into Brazilian culture. The beaches will tend to be crowded year round (Herrington, 2001, pg. 86). The Brazilians created the dental floss bathing

suit and are very proud of it. Women at the beach will often wear much less clothing than an American may be used to. The beach is a great place to socialize and spend the day. Soccer can be seen as a religion in Brazil (Herrington, 2001, pg. 87). When Brazil makes it to the semi-finals of the World Cup, Brazilian business will send their employees home to watch the game (Herrington, 2001, pg. 87). Soccer will continue to be a major influence to Brazilians and you should familiarize yourself with the sport. The bars in Brazil are less of a club scene and more of a quiet place to socialize. The bars are a home away from home for Brazilians (Herrington, 2001, pg. 87). Brazil, like most South American countries, runs on the 24 hour clock. See appendix for table of times. When you go out to eat in Brazil there are some very important customs that you should be aware of.

## **Dining Etiquette**

Brazilian dining etiquette can be very different from the United States. Nearly everything you will eat will require the use of utensils (Herrington, 2001, pg. 83). It isn't polite to use your hands during dining, so try to refrain from using them. Lunch is typically the largest meal of the day (Herrington, 2001, pg. 83). However, dinner will typically be the longest meal of the day and will begin around 8 or 9 P.M. and can last to the early morning hours (Herrington, 2001, pg. 83). If invited to dinner with your business partner, it is inappropriate to talk business over the meal and should be saved till after the meal. Most meals in Brazil will be centered on beef, pork, or seafood. Brazil has a very diverse spread of meals and will vary by the region you are visiting. Some meals will include cuts of meat that Americans typically discard. These meals honor their slave heritage and it would be considered rude if you refuse these dishes.

Understanding the communication, work norms, social norms, and dining etiquette are the keys to success on your trip to Brazil. Brazilians are very proud of their heritage and customs. Following the guidelines provided will enhance your ability to respectfully interact with Brazilians. Using the information provided will ensure your success in Brazil.

# 3

## Russia

Traveling to Russia might be necessary for your position in this company. Russia has one of the top 10 economies based on gross domestic product (GDP) (World Factbook, 2012). Being successful on a international business trip means knowing the country and the culture. This section of the report will focus on Russian culture. Specifically it will discuss communication, norms (social and work), and dining etiquette in the business setting.

### Communication

Communicating well with your clients in Russia is of utmost importance. We want the people you talk with to focus on the content of what you say and not peculiarities you might have being a foreigner.

A first encounter you have while in Russia is quite different than here in the United States. Often Russians dont smile when meeting a new person and accompany it with a handshake in a business setting (King, 2010, pg. 158).

Regarding the language you should speak, over half of the people in the top Russian companies can speak English. The number drops from there in other lesser companies but is still considerably high. Be aware that some people might translate their Russian into rude or direct English. Dont be offended by this; it is merely a communication quirk of translation (King, 2010, pg. 158).

When meeting someone, dont be surprised to learn that they want to be called Pasha or Sasha



if their name really is Pavel or Alexander, respectively. It is common practice to have nicknames that might not look anything like their given name (Experiences, 2007).

A rather humorous side-effect of this nicknaming is that some characters can have many names in Russian literature. The book *The Brothers Karamazov* by Fyodor Dostoevsky has a main character named Alexei Karamazov. Throughout the book, he is referred to by his real name or one of his 8 other nicknames: Alyosha, Alyoshka, Alyoshenka, Alyoshechka, Alexeichik, Lyosha, Lyoshenka. Getting use to all the nicknames takes a handful of chapters (Dostoyevsky, 2002).

## Social & Work Norms

Before talking about the social norms in Russia, it'll be important to understand what a quintessential Russian is. A Russian is typically characterized as being incredibly patient, very kind, accommodating, and very laid back (King, 2010, pg. 70).

Americans have a very well established spatial bubble when it comes to people we know and people we meet. In Russia, expect this bubble to be much smaller and closer to you. Since people will be closer to you their voices will be just as loud. Don't be alarmed if it seems at first that a Russian is yelling at you. If the person is closer to you, it might just be the proximity (King, 2010, pg. 84).

When going to a meeting, it is important to dress such that you fit in with the rest of your colleagues. Wearing appropriate clothing is almost as important as how you greet the person. It is important to wear dark clothing and a suit. Make sure your tie, shoes, socks, and everything else match the attire. Wearing too many colors might not be the best and might give off the impression of laziness (King, 2010, pg. 148).

Humor in Russia, like in all places, will show up in conversations frequently. Russians are often attributed as being very good at black humor. Black humor is defined as the juxtaposition of morbid and farcical elements to give a disturbing effect. To give an example of this, there is a book called *The Master and Margarita* written in sometime in the early 20th century. It centers around events in Moscow after Satan shows up with a witch and a black cat that enjoys drinking vodka and playing chess. It is full of black humor and is considered by some critics as being the best novels of the 20th century (Bulgakov, 1996).

## Dining Etiquette

Be sure to eat until you are stuffed. According to tradition, it is rude to the cook to refuse food. Toasting is another tradition that is strong in Russia. You can expect the host to start it. If you are at a loss of things to say, a few common ones include: to your health and one for the road. You can expect to do a lot of drinking as well. Like with the food, it'll be considered rude to turn it down. If you are really against drinking, turn it down politely (Bosrock, 1995).

Your table manners are very important as well. As you might do in America, don't eat until everyone has received their food. It will be safe to eat when you see your host eating.

When not holding the utensils, try to keep your hands visible. If you it feels awkward, just place your wrists on the top of the table and hold your hands (Lininger, 1999).

## 4

# South Africa

South Africa has rich culture leading back to its colonial days. Dutch settled on the Cape of the country and British settled on the mainland of South Africa during this time. Between its colonial days and up until 1994, when the country was transformed into a democracy, the country had experienced ethnical, racial conflicts, and even the introduction to slavery, which was abolished by the British in 1834 (David Coplan). But ever since the democratic transformation in 1994. The country has been freed of ethnic and racial violence amongst themselves and has been succeeding as a nation ever since. Understanding the South African culture will help us better understand the people that live within the country. With this knowledge you should be able to effectively dine, communicate, and understand social norms in South Africa.

## Communication

There are eleven official languages spoken in South Africa, including English, Afrikaans, Tamil, Urdu, and the southern Bantu Languages (David Coplan). According to David Coplan, Afrikaans is still the most generally used in everyday conversation in South Africa because of family heritage. That being said, you will be able to find English speakers there and will not need a translator unless in a non-English speaking area. English is used for education, law, government, and formal communication in South Africa so your business colleagues should speak English.

This next piece of advice is a cultural norm very different from American culture, so it is important to remember. If you are asked out to dinner or to a social event, pay attention to whether

or not they imply that his or her spouse is also going. If the answer is yes, in the request to go out, it is implied that the invitation is extended to both your family and their own (David Coplan). When attending, you should bring your spouse; if not it may be seen as disrespectful. Again, due to Muslim culture, genders may dine separately. Bring your spouse will give their spouse someone to eat and converse with.

As mentioned earlier, in South Africa you will be perfectly fine speaking English, most of the business men and women will be fluent in English. If your colleagues start speaking Afrikaans be patient with them and ask them to clarify to you and do not be afraid to ask if you would like to know what they said to each other. Above all else, be respectful and patient, for some of them might not be as fluent as others.

## **Social & Work Norms**

In South Africa there are a lot of different cultures that were introduced in the countrys colonization. Having roots that go back to European culture, South Africa has a long history of being primarily Christian in its background including small minority groups of Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu within the country (David Coplan). The main two countries that colonized in South Africa were the Dutch and the British. This may explain how western culture still resides in of the country today.

According to David Coplans article on South Africa, the majority of people in South Africa are known to be polite and courteous to others. As you move into larger cities within the country, they are more likely to express discontent in situations they feel uncomfortable in. African culture acknowledges pride and honor to the elder men and women in the communities. If invited into a home, remember to pronounce their name followed by son of fathers/mothers name out of respect for the parents (David Coplan). South Africa remains similar to other cultures worldwide recognition of family honor.

Overall what David Coplan found while in South Africa is most of the people are very hospitable, helpful, sympathetic, and anxious to avoid verbal conflict. Remember to be respectful of other peoples space and beliefs in order to not cause conflicts. In this country the worst criticism bestowed upon someone is being called rude (David Coplan). In order to avoid the criticizing title

of rude, show respect to all, including extended family; this will lead to a much smoother time.

## Dining Etiquette

When traveling to South Africa, the cuisine is an aspect of local culture that should not be ignored. Being a colonial territory South Africa; it has many different cultures that have influenced the country's history and its food. The main influences are Western foods and Asian foods (Mike Lininger, International Dining Etiquette). According to Mike Lininger, an expert in South African culture, reports that Local food is rich in rice, yams and cassava (a root vegetable), plus breads, fresh vegetables, and fruits. Fish is the most common protein found in South Africa because it is more readily available due to its close proximity to rivers and the ocean. South Africa is a predominantly Muslim country, which affects the acceptance of certain foods. For example, eating pork can be considered offensive. Alcohol can also be disrespectful, so follow this rule of thumb; only order alcohol if your host does, this is the best way to play it safe. Men and women are accustomed to sitting separately in South Africa because of the Jewish and Muslim history so also be aware if one of your colleagues is of the opposite sex you do not want to leave them out of your business conversations.

According to Mike Lininger, Eating styles are similar to European culture, which permits the use of both hands, however two guide lines should be followed. The first is that utensils should not switch hands during the meal. The second is that your right hand should be used as your dominant hand, while using the left only if your meal requires it. Similar to custom in western cultures it is polite to wash one's hands before eating, but it differs in that you should also wash your hands when you are done eating your meal.

When eating at a restaurant it is very normal to tip the waiter/waitress ten percent of the meal price. They will refuse and tell you that it isn't necessary but really they will greatly appreciate it and it is a common courtesy. In South Africa it is custom that whoever invites you to lunch will also be paying for the meal you are eating (Mike Lininger, International Dining Etiquette). Over lunch it is normal for men to talk about work and family while they are eating. Be prepared to sit around after the meal to have conversations which could just be an extension of what you talked about over lunch or more business. So keep in mind you might spend time after eating continuing

your discussions.

In summary the four most important things to remember are to wash your hands before and after the meal, eat with your right hand primarily, choose your food out of respect for the other persons believes, and do not drink alcohol unless it is offered to you. If you can follow these four basic things you should be able to survive a business lunch in South Africa.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this document is to inform English 314 employees on the cultures we are sending them to. The information we provide will allow each employee to interact with these cultures professionally and successfully. The most important components you need to know when conducting business in a foreign culture are communication, work norms, social norms, and dining etiquette of those cultures. We will layout the key points of each of these for Russia, South Africa, and Brazil. The information we have gathered comes from web sites, books, and personal experiences. These sources all provide up to date accurate information. In the culture is very different from the United States.

## Appendix A

### Brazil Bibliography

Herrington, E. (2001). *Passport Brazil: Your Pocket Guide to Brazilian Business*.

**Comment**

This source was where most of my content came from. It has very specific information and is related to the business world. World Trade Press.

Kagan, Donald et al. (2010). *The Western Heritage*. 10th.

**Comment**

This is an old history book that I used for historical information on Brazil. I mainly used it to find the dates of independence to provide a brief introduction to Brazil. London: Prentice Hall.



## Appendix B

# Russia Bibliography

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## Appendix C

### South Africa Bibliography

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