

## Title:

American Standards and European Culture: How to Avoid a Disappointing Vacation Experience While Traveling in Europe

## Word Count:

1092

## Summary:

Many European vacationers plan their activities and accommodations with the assumption that everything else will be "like America." If so, think again! Europeans and Americans have different ideas about manners, time, personal space, personal property maintenance, and language. Here are a few "cross cultural conflict" areas that Americans traveling in Europe often encounter.

## Keywords:

Vacation Europe,travel Europe,European vacation,American standards,European culture,disappointing vacation experience,travel Europe,traveling in Europe,cultural conflict,cultural misunderstanding

## Article Body:

Planning a vacation to Europe? No doubt you have certain expectations about your upcoming journey.

Perhaps you're the kind of person who expects to spend your days admiring amazing architecture and prowling world-famous museums for masterpieces. Or maybe you're going to Europe to meet interesting people, relax on the beach until the sun goes down, and dance the night away in a local club. Regardless of your European vacation priorities, you certainly expect it to be wonderful!

But stop a moment. Have you thought about your *cultural* expectations?

Many European vacationers plan their activities and accommodations with the assumption that everything else will be "like America." If so, think again! Just as Europe and the US are different in landscape, weather, and history, they are also very different culturally. Europeans and Americans have different ideas about manners, time, personal space, personal property maintenance, and language.

So for anyone planning a vacation to Europe, here are a few "cross cultural conflict" areas that Americans traveling in Europe often encounter. Making yourself aware of these differences can help you have a fun, enjoyable, and even

educational European vacation that is free of cultural misunderstandings!

### <b>Personal Space</b>

Take a glance at a map of the world. Which is smaller: the US or Europe? That's right-- Europe. But there are still a lot of people there, which means they've gotten used to smaller spaces!

American standards of living are very high. We're used to king size beds and bathrooms that can accommodate several people at a time.

But unless you're staying in a massive French chateau or Italian villa, be prepared for spaces to be smaller than you're used to. Bedrooms and bathrooms will be more compact, as will bed sizes. Single and double beds alike will be narrower. Kitchens won't be able to accommodate your entire family!

So consider this an opportunity to get closer to your traveling companions. Think of sharing a bathroom in Italy as an exercise in cooperation. Get cozy with your spouse in that French double bed. Be willing to laugh as you adjust. Get creative and have fun!

### <b>Manners</b>

A common misperception of Europeans is that they are "rude." Of course, they think the same thing about us!

Remember when you're traveling in Europe that rudeness is largely a cultural perception. Someone who seems blunt and nosey may be expressing friendship and concern for your well-being. A waiter who tells you what to order may be trying to help, since you are unfamiliar with the language. Differences in "personal space" mean that someone who cuts in front of you may not even understand that you were in line!

Also, subjects which are taboo in your community may be freely discussed elsewhere, and vice versa. In the US, we consider it incredibly rude to comment on a person's weight. This isn't true everywhere in the world!

So, when traveling in Europe, keep a firm grip on your temper. A good way to achieve this is to give everyone else the benefit of the doubt. Just make the choice *<i>not</i>* to get angry. If you can roll with the punches, you'll enjoy your vacation more-- and you'll be a better traveling companion.

### <b>Time</b>

I have to admit that I get impatient if I have to wait longer than fifteen minutes at a restaurant in the US. After the food comes, I can be out the door in half an hour!

In Italy, however, a dinner filled with conversation, laughter, and great food can last two hours! I smile when I hear other Americans asking why the food hasn't arrived yet. Unbeknownst to them, the waiters are offering them the opportunity to *savor* the meal.

Likewise, shops and businesses in Spain close for an afternoon siesta. In the UK, the handyman may want to chat with you before repairing that pipe.

Most Europeans do not share the American compulsion to "save time" by doing everything quickly. So when you vacation in Europe, leave your watch behind. After all, this is a *vacation!*

### **Quality**

I often hear complaints, especially from those who rent a villa or apartment, about the quality of the furnishings and amenities in Europe. I'd be a millionaire if I had a dime for every time I heard someone say "The furniture was old!" or "The bathroom pipes need to be replaced."

In today's society, we expect things to look like new, feel like new, and behave like new. If it doesn't, we throw it away.

But think of anyone who grew up during the depression. My grandfather kept rows of old coffee cans filled with spare nails and bits of wire. He sat in the same chair every night until he died. Nothing was wasted, and nothing was thrown away if it could be fixed.

So if the furniture looks a little worn, or if the sink clogs, think before you complain. Is the quality due to neglect and disrepair, or is it the result of a careful, conscientious effort not to put anything to waste?

Treat this as an educational experience; you might even learn from a more conservative lifestyle.

### **Language**

As an American, I am often jealous of Europeans who pick up languages like you'd pick up a bottle of milk at the store. For me, it's an uphill battle all the

way!

Since learning three or four languages is neither a cultural necessity nor a scholastic requirement in our country, many Americans feel like me. And yet some Americans still assume that everyone in Europe should speak English!

In the same way that you or I would resent a French tourist who expected everyone in the US to speak French, Europeans are often annoyed by Americans who have this mentality.

While you probably can't learn a new language before your vacation, you can learn some helpful phrases. This is considered courteous, and is guaranteed to get more friendly responses. When you try to use their language, Italians or French who might have feigned ignorance will usually help you with your pronunciation-- and then converse with you in English!

**The Right Attitude**

Lastly, remember that the standards and the customs you find while traveling in Europe are not *wrong*. They're just *different*. If you travel with the right attitude, you will have a richer, more authentic, and even eye-opening experience. Who knows? Your European vacation may change the way you see the world.