

Things that Americans Don't Know about the Rest of the World

Attached is an excerpt written by Bernard Rosenkränzer from Switzerland for a Quora blog. Bernard has spent much time in the USA and has traveled the globe. Here are some questions from his American friends about their views on the rest of the world. His article, his opinions, his view, but worth a read.

1. The US is not the only democratic country in the world. Not the most democratic country either.

This is what democracy looks like in parts of Switzerland:

Landsgemeinde is an open-air meeting to conduct cantonal business, held once a year in Appenzell, in the canton of Appenzell Inner-Rhoden in Switzerland. At the meeting, citizens vote on representatives for cantonal offices and on budget and tax proposals. The people tend to vote for what's best for the country, even if it isn't what's best for them personally.



2. "Socialism" isn't an "on" or "off" switch.

It's more like a volume regulator where neither the "0%" nor the "100%" position is usually the best setting. Just because a proposed solution could be called "socialist" doesn't necessarily mean it's a bad thing (nor does it necessarily mean it's a good thing).

3. Problems that seem the same on the surface are not necessarily similar.

For example, a Swiss person who thinks immigration needs to be restricted usually thinks of the fact that there's just not that much space in the country (population density: 523.2 per square mile) and taking in more people would mean having to replace a national park with skyscrapers or something.

Obviously, someone in a country with plenty of unused space is talking about something else when calling for restrictions on immigration.

4. Even a good thing will not necessarily work the same in other parts of the world.

Very obviously, the American system works for America, and is far from the worst in the world. It doesn't mean that it would work equally well in other parts of the world. A country like Iraq doesn't want the American system imposed on them any more than most Americans would want Iraq's system imposed on them. Even if a system seems "obviously better" (and certainly is better *for you*), that doesn't mean it'll be better for everyone else, and imposed due to their point of view about correctness. And someone who doesn't want your working system imposed on his country doesn't hate you or want to take that aspect of the system away from you.

Even someone who hates some aspect of your country doesn't necessarily hate your country as a whole (and almost certainly doesn't hate you as a person just because you happen to come from that country).

5. The rest of the world is much less monolithic than you're thinking.

Africa is not a country (neither is there an "African" language). Switzerland isn't Sweden, Austria isn't Australia, Slovenia isn't Slovakia. There is no "Indian" language (India has many languages that aren't even similar to each other). Even a small country like Switzerland (less than 8 million inhabitants) has 4 official languages (and just because Geneva speaks French doesn't mean everyone in Zurich can even understand French). Iran is nothing like Iraq (nor are their languages are similar).

6. Most of the world thinks in Meters, Grams, and Celsius.

Miles, feet, and inches are officially called the Imperial system (for historic reasons). Someone calling them that is not accusing you of imperialism, nor does he hate you.

7. In most parts of the world, it is much harder to strike up a conversation.

In many parts of the world, it's simply unusual to strike up a conversation with a random stranger, for no obvious reason.

If you get on a train or bus in Switzerland and the person sitting next to you ignores you completely, that person doesn't hate you, isn't being unfriendly and it doesn't even mean he can't understand you or is an extreme introvert. He's just doing what people do here.

8. You think your country is dog friendly? Think again...

In many countries (Switzerland, Austria, most of Germany, Italy, ...), it's highly unusual if a restaurant or hotel does NOT allow its customers to bring their dogs. Many will even give the dog a bowl of water without anyone asking for it.

9. Getting funding for just an idea is much harder in most other countries

In the Silicon Valley, it's not all that unusual for a startup to start out with nothing but an idea and get several millions in VC funding.

In the rest of the world, it's much harder to get funding without having something proven to work. If you want to launch a startup and you do manage to find an investor, the "investment" frequently comes in the form of a high-interest loan to be repaid within a few years.

The reason why most "next big things" come out of Silicon Valley and a few other places is not that the rest of the world lacks "crazy ideas" or the skills to implement them - they just have a harder time getting them funded and marketed.

There was a Swiss company building an e-Reader a few years before they made it to the mass market, and there was a German company building a PVR some time before Tivo - they went out of business having to repay the loans.

10. You're being exposed to propaganda

Propaganda is not unique to any country, and no country is exempt from it. The media does not always tell the full story. Not the Russian media, but also not the US media. If you want to get a real impression on what is going on in e.g. Crimea, take a look at both US media and Russian media. Subtract the propaganda from both sides, take what remains. It's usually somewhere in the middle.

Here are nine things Americans can learn from the rest of the world.

English isn't the only language

According to a study of smart phone users, the USA has the second lowest percentage of people able to speak more than one language at just 13.8 %.

Africa is a continent, not a country

Americans refer to Africa as a whole, forgetting it is made up of 54 different countries. Furthermore, many locations are more affluent and developed than others realize. Not everyone in Africa is poor or lives in jungles or lives with wild animals.

Health care is much more affordable in Europe

For Americans getting ill is not just bad for your health but also for your bank balance. It is routinely the most expensive place to buy medical care, with many procedures and drugs costing much more than abroad.

Tip waiters

While it's customary in the U.S. and generally appreciated in Europe, in some Asian countries like Japan, leaving a tip isn't typical and is often even considered an insult

US dollars aren't a global currency

The US may be a huge country with a dominant currency but that doesn't mean it can be used anywhere on the planet.

School System

Americans think that they have the best of everything including the school system. European high schools may not have the same pop cultural cachet, but it's generally known that whatever goes on inside them, they're better in many ways than their American counterparts. Schools in countries like Finland, for example, have effectively given up on the repetitive learning style, which might be why those countries regularly outpace American education scores. Even Poland, where one in six children live in relative poverty, continually beats the US in math, science, and reading. Vocational schools are more highly encouraged to find a working skill.

Vacation Time

The top seven countries in the world, in terms of time off? [All European](#). Austrians get 35 paid days off per year. Nobody criticizes them for being lazy.

Fuel Efficient cars

In Europe, nobody laughs at the guy driving the car that's only slightly larger than a bathtub...because they're likely driving those cars, too. In USA everything needs to be BIG BIG BIG!

The Spanish Steps are not Spanish

Is nothing sacred? Say it isn't so. Sorry – if we are being truthful, the [Spanish Steps](#) are mainly French, in that they were funded by a donation from a French diplomat, Etienne Gueffier. There is also a case for them being Italian, as they were crafted by two Italian architects, Francesco de Sanctis and Alessandro Specchi – although, seeing as the Kingdom of Italy did not come into being until 1861, and the staircase was built between 1723 and 1725, that description is also problematic.

Europe is not the same as the European Union

Its true that by now the majority of Europeans live in EU-member states. But there are still dozens of countries in Europe that are not a member, and the EU still covers less than half of Europe's physical area. Besides, contrary to what Eurosceptics and Europhiles alike would like you to believe, the EU is not a super-state. Its members are independent countries who largely run their own affairs.