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American. American. American. We were sitting at a café in Paris with our Parisian friend, and she was pointing out the tourists who were obviously from the United States. White tennis shoes and sweatpants. “I love NY” b-ball cap. Zip-off, microfiber cargo pants topped with a safari vest.

“C’est tellement évident,” she sighed. And she didn’t mean it in a good way.

Standing out in a foreign country as an obvious tourist is a major faux pas. You’ll likely get treated differently (usually worse) and be an open target for pickpockets and scams. Plus, it’s just not cool. You want to blend in as much as possible, which will not only help keep you safer, but allow you to engage more with the locals, giving you a more culturally-authentic travel experience.

Whether you’re a newbie to international travel or a longtime pro, consider these tips from travel experts on how not to look like a tourist.

Ditch the logo and lounge wear

Sure, you’re proud to be an American, and love those New England Patriots, but leave the logo T-shirts and hats at home, and opt for comfortable walking shoes instead of sneakers, and casual slacks instead of sweatpants.

“Avoid being the stereotypical tourist in bold colors or loud patterns, and wearing shorts and short-sleeved T-shirts,” says Mitch Krayton, principal and travel consultant with Krayton Travel. “Even in warm climates, folks like in Paris, will wear full-length trousers, not shorts or jeans.”

In general, experts advise dressing up a bit more. “Around the world, people appreciate American culture. We’re also the biggest spenders!” says Steve Perillo, president and owner of Perillo Tours. “But in public, we wear clothes Italians would wear to clean out their chicken coop.”

Cover up

Dress conservatively, avoiding skimpy, skin-revealing clothes. In many cultures, the exposure of skin, even shoulders, legs, feet, and ankles, is considered taboo. If you’re not sure, do some research, or ask your travel adviser about local customs.

“When in Rome is my motto,” says Vicki Winters, adviser with Bucket List Travelers. “I’ll wear a hijab in a Muslim country.”

At the very least, cover up. Wear long pants or skirts and long-sleeved shirts, especially when visiting churches or other holy places. Women should carry a shawl or scarf to cover their heads or drape over their shoulders, when necessary.

“Be respectful of other cultures,” says Melinda Fortunato, travel adviser and owner of Best Travel. “Embrace the beauty of the similarities and differences!”

Don’t appear dazed and confused

Here’s the scene: You’re stopped in the middle of a busy intersection, as people try to move around you. You’re lost, looking up and down the street, and gazing at your map or smartphone. Or, you have Google maps turned on high volume, announcing your next step. Either way, you’re screaming tourist. First, consult a map and figure out



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Clockwise (from left): Ditch the bulky backpacks, which are nuisances on crowded public transportation and a magnet for pickpockets; tourists consult a map in the center of Bruges, Belgium; visitors in Paris take a selfie with the Arc de Triomphe in the background; if you really want a memento or souvenir, seek out local artisans and markets not tourist trap stores.

little homework beforehand so you can recognize most of the bills and coins. Know roughly what the exchange rate is also, but don’t sweat the tiny decimal difference. Round up or down, and skip the currency converter.

Talking about money: Not leaving the restaurant wait staff or the bellhop a tip in America is largely unacceptable. But tipping is not mandatory or expected in many countries, and may be considered rude in some. For example, in Japan and China, tipping, especially at a restaurant, may be considered an insult. Learn the social etiquette on tipping, and practice it.

Travel lightly

Less is always more when traveling. Ditch the bulky backpacks, which are nuisances on crowded public transportation and a magnet for pickpockets. Also, industry experts recommend against money belts, designer clothing, and flashy jewelry. And when it comes to taking photographs, leave the large

camera bag full of equipment at home.

“I bring along what they call a bridge camera on my travels, no lenses to change,” says Krayton. “However, the modern cellphone is everywhere in the world. Photos on phones can work well enough for most pictures and make you blend in as well.”

But don’t even think about taking a selfie.

“More than fanny packs and the clichéd attire of socks with sandals, a sure sign of a tourist is the selfie,” says Terry Dale, president and CEO, United States Tour Operators Association. “Just admiring a spectacular view might peg me as a visitor, but it doesn’t scream tourist nearly as loudly or definitively as someone with a selfie stick.”

Finally, consider taking fewer photos. When you’re behind the lens of a camera, you not only look like a tourist, you’re also missing out on the experience of just being there.

Speak up

We heard this advice from nearly every travel adviser and industry spokesperson we talked to: Learn a few words of the local language. “I will always at the very least be able to say ‘hello,’ ‘excuse me,’ and ‘thank you’ in the language of the country I am visiting,” says Winters. Knowing a handful of popular local foods and menu items is also helpful.

Slow down

One of the best ways to blend in is to slow down. Besides the major tourist sights and attractions, seek out local neighborhoods, ethnic quarters, and off-the-beaten path destinations. Take time to stroll the streets taking in sights, sounds, and smells, and to linger at a local café.

And don’t become a frazzled, demanding tourist when things don’t go exactly as planned. Roll with the punches. “While it’s a little painful to say as a travel adviser, when we work so hard to make sure our clients’ trips go smoothly, sometimes it’s when things go sideways that the real experiences start,” says Malakoff.

Travel small

Big groups (think: cruise crowds, bus tours) are giving tourists a bad name, inundating a destination. And it’s hard to blend in when you travel with a mob.

“I strongly believe that slowing down, not overscheduling yourself, and traveling by yourself or in a smaller group will make you feel less like a tourist, and allow you to better soak up the destination,” says Malakoff. “Crush around with a large group, rushing off sights, and you’ll have problems remembering afterwards if you saw that church in Germany or in France. How memorable will that be?”

Stop buying things

Nothing says you’re an American quite like being one of the people jostling for space in tourist trap stores, waving credit cards, and emptying shelves of foreign-imported refrigerator magnets and shot glasses. If you really want a memento or souvenir, seek out local artisans and markets.

Finally, Evan McElliott, travel adviser with Maine-based Longer Vacations, offers this: “Ultimately, my advice is to behave like a guest, not a tourist.”

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