



Rick Steves Travel as a Political Act

By Rick Steves

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Travel connects people with people. It helps us fit more comfortably and compatibly into a shrinking world, and it inspires creative new solutions to persistent problems facing our nation. We can't understand our world without experiencing it. *Rick Steves Travel as a Political Act* helps us take that first step.

There's more to travel than good-value hotels, great art, and tasty cuisine. Americans who “travel as a political act” can have the time of their lives and come home smarter—with a better understanding of the interconnectedness of today's world and just how our nation fits in.

In the second edition of this award-winning book, acclaimed travel writer Rick Steves explains how to travel more thoughtfully—to any destination. With updated information on Europe, Central America, and Asia; an expanded discussion of the Middle East; and a brand-new chapter on the Holy Land that covers Israelis and Palestinians today, Rick shows readers how his travels have shaped his politics and broadened his perspective.

The royalties from the sale of this edition will be donated by Rick Steves to Bread for the World, a Christian organization working to end hunger around the world.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Rick Steves has spent 100 days every year since 1973 exploring Europe. Rick produces a public television series (*Rick Steves Europe*), a public radio show (*Travel with Rick Steves*), and an app and podcast (*Rick Steves Audio Europe*); writes a bestselling series of guidebooks and a nationally syndicated newspaper column; organizes guided tours that take thousands of travelers to Europe annually; and offers an information-packed website (RickSteves.com). With the help of his hardworking staff of 80 at Rick Steves Europe, Inc.—in Edmonds, Washington, just north of Seattle—Rick's mission is to make European travel fun, affordable, and culturally broadening for Americans.

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Top Ten Tips for making Travel a Political Act

For me, the great value of travel is the opportunity to pry open your hometown blinders and bring home a broader perspective. And when we implement that worldview as citizens of our great nation, we make travel a political act. Here are my top ten practical tips for doing just that:

- 1. Get out of your comfort zone.** Chose Managua over Mazatlán, or Turkey over Greece. When visiting Israel, make time to also explore the West Bank. You can enjoy far richer experiences for far less money by venturing away from the mainstream.
- 2. Connect with people — and try to understand them.** Make itinerary decisions that put you in touch with locals who are also curious about you. Stay in people's homes (via Airbnb.com or Couchsurfing.org) and spend time with your hosts. Go to a university, eat in the cafeteria, and make a new friend. Then, seek answers for cultural riddles: Why do Hindus feed their cows better than their children? Why do many Muslim women wear scarves? Why do Americans so fiercely defend their right to own a gun? Why do Norwegians so willingly pay such high taxes?
- 3. Celebrate diversity and be a cultural chameleon.** When encountering a cultural difference, embrace it with joy rather than with judgment...and actually join in: Eat with your fingers in Sri Lankan restaurants that have no silverware, dip your fries in mayonnaise in Belgium, smoke a hookah in Greece, get your ears cleaned in India, kiss a stranger on both cheeks in France, and go to a hurling match in Ireland. Rather than gawking at the pilgrims, become one — climb Rome's Scala Santa (Holy Stairs) on your knees, feeling the pain while finding comfort in the frescoes of saints all around you.
- 4. Understand the contemporary context.** While traveling, get caught up on local news. Read *The Times of India* in Mumbai. Go to a political rally in Scotland. Listen to expat radio on Spain's Costa del Sol. Think about how all societies are on parallel evolutionary tracks. Imagine how the American approach to vexing societal problems might work in other places — and (more importantly) vice versa.
- 5. Empathize with the other 96% of humanity.** Just like Americans have the American Dream, others have their own dreams. Make a point to put yourself in the shoes (or sandals, or bare feet) of the people you meet. Find out why Basque people are so passionate about their language. Drinking with Catholics in a Northern Ireland pub, discuss the notion of the tyranny of the majority...and then find a parallel in your society. As

you travel, learn to celebrate the local Nathan Hales and Ethan Allens — Turkey's Atatürk, El Salvador's Oscar Romero, South Africa's Mandela, and so on.

6. Identify — and undermine — your own ethnocentricity. The US has been preoccupied with terrorism for the last generation. But other nations have their own, sometimes even heavier baggage. Ponder societal needs even more fundamental than freedom and democracy. Why is Putin so popular in Russia? Why would a modern and well-educated Egyptian be willing to take a bullet for the newest military dictator (as my friend in Cairo just told me)? Why, in some struggling countries, does stability trump democracy?

7. Accept the legitimacy of other moralities. Be open to the possibility that controversial activities are not objectively "right" or "wrong." Consider Germany's approach to prostitution or the Netherlands' marijuana policy, which are both based on pragmatic harm reduction rather than moralism. Get a French farmer's take on force-feeding his geese to produce foie gras. Pop in on a circumcision party to help celebrate a young Turkish boy's coming of age. Ask a Spaniard why bullfighting still thrives as the national pastime — and why it's covered not in the sports pages, but in the arts section of the local newspaper. You don't have to like their answer, but at least try to understand it.

8. Sightsee with an edge. Seek out political street art...and find out what it means. Read local culture magazines and attend arts and political events. Take alternative tours to learn about heroin maintenance clinics in Switzerland, Copenhagen's Christiania commune, and maquiladora labor in Tijuana. Walk with a local guide through a slum in a developing country. Meeting desperately poor villagers living with a spirit of abundance, ponder how so many rich people live with a mindset of scarcity.

9. Make your trip an investment in a better world. Our world has a lot of desperation, and travelers are the lucky few who can afford to experience what's outside their own hometowns. Travel with a goal of good stewardship — the idea that each traveler has a responsibility to be an ambassador to, and for, the entire planet. Think of yourself as a modern-day equivalent of the medieval jester: sent out by the king to learn what's going on outside the walls, and then coming home to speak truth to power...even if annoying.

10. Make a broader perspective your favorite souvenir. Back home, be evangelical about your newly expanded global viewpoint. Travel shapes who you are. Weave favorite strands of other cultures into the tapestry of your own life. Live your life as if it shapes the world and the future...because it does. Believe that you matter. Then make a difference.

Rick Steves has collected a lifetime of travel lessons into the new, second edition of his book, Travel as a Political Act.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Shellie Toy:

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