“Cultural Blunders” Article Discussion

Facilitator Overview

This is a set of discussion questions that go along with the article “The Costly (and Humorous) Impact of Cultural Blunders” by Neil Payne, Culturosity.com. These questions can be used pre-field, in-field, or post-field (see below).

Pre-field Option:
Have you had any experiences with cultural misunderstandings like these? Share them!
What assumptions are being made by the different sides in each of these scenarios?
How could the blunder have been avoided, by one side or the other?
What are some strategies that we could use when we travel to avoid potential blunders? What should we be aware of?

The pre-field version of this discussion can be followed up with an assignment to students to do some research on cultural practices, traditions, and beliefs of the culture they will be visiting. Students can share this information and think through some behavioral adjustments that they could make in the field.

In-field Option:
Pre-reading: think back to your trip so far. Have you experienced any odd misunderstandings or awkward situations? Let’s take a moment to share these experiences and how they felt.
Post-reading:
What assumptions are being made by the different sides in each of these scenarios?
How could the blunder have been avoided, by one side or the other?
During the trip thus far, have you experienced or observed any blunders or misunderstandings? What assumptions have you been making about the people you have interacted with?
How can we adjust our behavior to work more effectively with our community partner?

Post-Field Option:
What assumptions are being made by the different sides in each of these scenarios?
How could the blunder have been avoided, by one side or the other?
Are there any blunders or misunderstandings that stand out from the trip? What assumptions did you make about the people you interacted with? How could those misunderstandings have been avoided?
How can we apply what we learned on this trip to future intercultural situations?

The post-field version of this discussion can be followed up with a group brainstorming session to come up with a new list of “cultural blunders” that occurred or could have occurred in the place they just visited. They could also come up with some tips for future visitors.