

1. To some clueless tourists, common sense may not be a good enough reason to learn the language when traveling in a foreign country. However, the reason is simple. If you expect courteous treatment, knowing the basics of a language proves you're reaching out to show consideration. It will help very much when meeting local people, shopkeepers, hotel employees, cabbies and everyone else you encounter.

Even the most simple good mornings and a few other language pleasantries can make a great difference in attitudes of the local people toward foreign visitors. Often, knowledge of the language means savings in prices of goods and services.

2. The old phrase describing some foreign cities as "tourist traps" was probably coined by arrogant English-only-speaking visitors who dressed and acted in such outlandish manners that prices immediately jumped everywhere they made their fussy presence felt.

Beyond that, by speaking the language, a visitor doesn't have to stay in the big, overpriced hotels where staff is happy to speak English while hiking prices on everything. Searching for more modest accommodations is easier if visitors can seek, speak and negotiate in the native language.

Dealing with cabbies in their own language can be a great advantage, both in knowing how to negotiate the best price, and also as a resource for information about all the tourist sites, as well as events happening in the city. While learning a country's language, visitors should also study up on the currency values, so prices on everything can be understood, and be open for bargaining.

3. Dining in such delightful food-obsessed countries such as France, Italy, Greece, Mexico, Belgium, Japan and China, is much more interesting if the visitor can speak and order food in some of the basic language. It also encourages wandering away from the overpriced tourist restaurants and stores to smaller venues where local families eat and shop.

4. Saying at least several phrases in the country's language, such as please, thank you and good morning, can melt away the strangeness and isolation in a moment. Conversely, everyone is at a disadvantage when there is no possible conversation. It engenders resentment, suspicion and in some instances, outright hostility. A good way to start easing into a country's culture is to stop by a cafe, pub or bar. Striking up casual conversations with fellow customers bypasses problems with price negotiations and other tourist-only subjects.

5. With free online language courses, CDs, DVDs, small digital translators all readily available for the traveler, learning basics of foreign languages is quicker and easier than ever been. Before you depart, and also last-minute while on the long flight or ocean voyage before you get to the foreign country, do your homework. You and your wallet will never regret it.

