

STEREOTYPES

A stereotype is a “standardized mental picture held in common by members of a group and representing an oversimplified opinion, affective attitude, or uncritical judgement (as of a person, race, issue, event).”

Stereotypes are not always wrong. Some of them contain too much truth for comfort. Stereotypes are rigid and keep people from seeing individual differences or variations. They prevent us from getting to the richer reality which lies beyond them.

If we can learn to identify stereotypes that we have we can break down the barriers to thinking clearly and avoid overgeneralizing.

Stereotypes are often based on lack of information. We tend to assume that everyone in the world sees it the way our culture does and we evaluate others' behavior in terms of our viewpoint.

Here are some of the most common stereotypes of Americans held by people in other countries:

AMERICANS ARE:

OUTGOING,	FRIENDLY	INFORMAL
EXTRAVAGANT,	WASTEFUL	WEALTHY
HARD WORKING	GENEROUS	IMMATURE
LOUD,	RUDE,	BOASTFUL,

RACIALLY PREJUDICED
ALWAYS IN A HURRY
CONFIDENT THEY HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS
LACKING IN CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS
DISRESPECTFUL OF AUTHORITY
IGNORANT OF OTHER COUNTRIES

How many of the items are positive and how many are negative? It depends upon our cultural point of view. What we think are positive values or admirable characteristics may be viewed negatively in the eyes of a person from another culture.

Anything you can do to break down the negative stereotypes people have of Americans will 1) make your own travel experience more pleasurable, 2) help those who follow you, 3) contribute to the improvement of the American image abroad, and 4) even contribute a bit to world understanding.

On the other side of the stereotyping coin, what attitudes do we as a group have about Mexican people and their culture?

In looking at stereotyping, here are some important ideas:

1) Throughout the world there are MANY different ways of doing things, looking at things.

2) Most are neither better or worse than our own. They are simply different.

3) At some point you will encounter stereotyping as you travel. Here are some useful guidelines in dealing with stereotyping:

- a) Resist becoming angry or defensive
- b) Avoid fitting the stereotype, be yourself
- c) When you catch yourself stereotyping others remember that you are expressing your cultural point of view. Try to look at what the other persons' cultural point of view might be.