

National stereotypes

“Heaven is where the police are British, the cooks are French, the mechanics are German, the lovers are Italian and it’s all organised by the Swiss. Hell is where the police are German, the cooks are English, the mechanics are French, the lovers are Swiss, and it’s all organised by the Italians.”

Discussion

Discuss in pairs or small groups:

1. Did you find the joke above amusing? If you did, is it because of what you know about these nationalities personally, or what you know of their reputations?
2. Would you like to change the joke in some way? Can you improve it by changing some of the nationalities or some of the jobs?
3. Do you have tourists from other countries where you live? Which nationalities? What are they like?

Reading

Read this article and underline anything that surprises you or that you think is not fair.

BRAZILIANS VOTED BEST TOURISTS, GERMANS WORST

In a recent survey conducted by the American Board of Tourism, professionals in various areas of the tourism industry have rated Brazilians as the world’s best tourists. The survey gave points for things like ‘politeness,’ ‘willingness to understand and speak English’ and ‘cultural sensitivity.’ People working in jobs ranging from taxi-drivers to hotel receptionists and airline flight attendants almost unanimously rated the Brazilians as being ‘friendly’ and ‘polite.’

The opposite seemed true of the Germans. “The Germans just don’t seem to get it,” said one manager of a hotel chain, based in New Orleans. “They’re rude and impatient yet they expect service with a smile. They travel outside Germany yet want to have things just like at home. Plus, they never tip.”

The best tippers are the Japanese, according to the survey. A travel agent representative explains: “The Japanese are afraid of ‘losing face’. They’ll do what they think is expected of them in the country they’re visiting, so they’re usually extremely polite. They rate very high in the cultural sensitivity category.”

The French scored extremely low in the ‘willingness to understand and speak English’ category. “It’s amazing. They can be so rude and snobby,” said a ticket agent at Chicago O’Hare International Airport. “You try to explain things to them and they answer you back in French. Not only that, they smoke too much — even where it’s not allowed — and they’re generally messy, leaving cigarettes and other rubbish on the floor. It’s unbelievable.” A summary of the Board’s survey is given below:

Friendliest nationalities:	Most polite:	Willingness to understand and speak English:	Most culturally-sensitive:
1. Brazilians	1. Japanese	1. Brazilians	1. Brazilians
2. Japanese	2. Brazilians	2. Dutch	2. Japanese
3. Koreans	3. British	3. Swiss	3. Romanians
4. Canadians	4. Spanish	4. Hungarians	4. Egyptians
5. Portuguese	5. Koreans	5. Poles	5. Koreans

Discuss with your partner what you underlined in the text.