

1. Geography:

- Where is your host country?
- What are some of its defining geographical features? How does the natural landscape limit access between different population groups or centers? How does this impact people's daily lives (medical care, education, labor and industry, migration in and out of rural and urban areas)?
- What is the capital city and why is it located where it is?
- What countries border your host country?
- What were your host country's original boundaries? How have they changed over time? For what reasons?
- Is it typical for families to travel between states/regions of the country?
- Do locations popular with tourists impede community development or improve it?

2. Climate and Environment:

- What is the climate like in your host country?
- What are the regional differences in the climate?
- How is global warming affecting your host country? (industrial/agricultural vs. environmental) What are the "hot" buttons/controversies?
- Are there problems with pollution? Are there pollution controls laws. Are there concerns about de-forestation and habitat?
- Are their protected public lands like National Parks and National Wildlife reserves?
- Is your host country a signatory to the Kyoto Accord? Is your home country a signatory to this accord. If not, why not?

3. History:

- What is the early history of your host country?
- Make a time line from the earliest history of your host country to the present. Mark the most important events. During those dates/periods, was anything related happening in your home country?
- What have been the patterns of immigration into your host country in the last 75 years? What influences remain today?
- Have there been any civil wars in your country? Are there lingering effects?
- What was your host country's involvement in any other major world conflicts?
- What new holidays will you celebrate? Who or what is being commemorated?

4. Religion:

- What are the major religions in your host country? Is there an official religion?
- To what extent are the major religions adhered to?
- What are the major religious holidays and what are some of the customs associated with these holidays.

5. Economy:

- What is the economy based on? What are some of their biggest/most important imports and exports?
- What products are traded between your host country and your home country?
- What products/services is your host region for?
- What is the per capita income? The gross national product (GNP)? What is the unemployment rate? When and how do people retire?
- Describe the currency. What is the historical /cultural significance of the symbols on the money?
- What is the current exchange rate?
- What is the currency and the exchange rate in the neighboring countries that you may get to visit?
- Are there distinct economic/social classes in your host country? How easy is it to move from one class to another? Are the different classes made up of different ethnic groups?

6. Educational System:

- How is the educational system organized?
- What do you see as the biggest differences between your educational system- especially as relates to high school and college?
- What are the requirements to graduate from high school?
- What are the relationships like between teachers/students/students families? Can you be friends or friendly with your teachers or is it a more formal connection?
- What happens with students who “don’t make it”? What are the options for students whose families cannot afford tuition?
- What percentage of students go on to university?
- Describe the University system. How expensive is it? Which are more prestigious- the private colleges or the public ones?

7. Food:

- What are some of the foods that your host country is famous for?
- What are some dishes that are indigenous?
- What are some regional differences in food in your host country?
- What does a liter of milk cost? A pound of butter? A dozen eggs? A loaf of bread? How does that compare with the cost of those items in your home city?
- What new fruits and vegetables will you get the opportunity to taste?
- What spices are used in cooking?
- Can you drink the water? If the drinking water supply is not generally safe (as luckily it is in N. America) how will you know when and where the water is safe to drink?

8. Health:

- What data can you find about: life expectancy, infant mortality, birth rates, leading causes of death, incidence of smoking, HIV, TB? How does that compare with the data from your home country?
- What do people do when they get sick? What are some common home remedies for things like a cold or sore muscles?
- What immunizations will you need to get prior to departure?
- How do people exercise or keep fit?

7. Current Events

- What are the hot button issues right now in your host country?
- What is the name of the main English language newspaper that you can read on-line?
- What are the names of two influential newspapers or magazines in your host country?
- What is the relationship between your country's government and that of your host country?
- What are the trade or political issues that have been a source of disagreement between your host country and your home country in the last five years?
- In what settings is it appropriate to talk about politics and religion? When? Where? With whom?
- Do people openly discuss attitudes and beliefs that may contradict the government or do these discussions happen privately?
- What is the crime rate ? What kinds of things to people visiting your host country have to be mindful of? Pickpockets? Purse thieves? What new behaviors might you have to adopt to keep yourself and your belongings safe?

8. Government

- How legitimate is the government? Was the last election free and fair?
- Who is your host country's top political leader? When was he/she they most recently elected?
- What do people who support him/her like about him/her?
- What do people who don't like him/or her have to say?
- How is the government organized? National vs. regional vs. local roles.
- How close is the military to the seat of power? When in the last 50 years have there been coups, juntas and /or dictators?
- What kinds of social services are available (or not available) for the poor?
- What is the voting age? Is voting required?
- Who is the ambassador from your country to your host country? Who is the ambassador from your host country to your home country? Where are the embassies located in each country? Are there other consular offices in each country?
- How big is the drug trade in your country? What is the relationship between the government and the drug trade?

9. Adolescence in your host country:

- What is the age of majority in your host country? (The age you become a legal adult)
- When can you get a driver's license?
- What is the drinking age in your host country? What are the penalties for using illegal drugs or underage drinking?
- What are family-role expectations of teenagers (school work, family obligations, family functions)
- What are the expectations for teenage family members when visitors stop by? Should you stay and listen? Stay and join in the conversation? Can you or should you leave the room?
- How do teens greet each other? How do they greet adults?
- What are common teenage household/family responsibilities? Part time work? Help with the dishes? Yard or laundry? Run errands?
- Curfews vary by family and often by gender, but what might you expect in your host culture regarding a curfew?
- What are popular leisure activities for teenagers?
- How do teenagers dress in your host country?

10. Language:

- What has been the influence of immigrants and indigenous peoples on the language of your host country?
- What percentage of the population speaks a second or third language? What percentage of the population speaks English?
- What are some idiomatic expressions or slang (not vulgar) that are unique to your country. (Example: "G-day, Mate!" in Australia.)
- How might someone describe the accent in your country? In your region?
- What is your language study plan while you are on exchange? How will you remember and integrate all the new vocabulary that you will encounter every day? How will you become proficient in grammar and writing?
- Learn as many ways as possible to politely say:

- ❖ Hello
- ❖ Thank you
- ❖ I appreciate that
- ❖ You are so kind
- ❖ Nice to meet you
- ❖ I am so glad to know you
- ❖ Goodbye
- ❖ I hope to see you again
- ❖ How can I help?
- ❖ What would you like me to do?
- ❖ Can I assist you?
- ❖ Do you need me to do anything?
- ❖ I would really like to help.

Helpful phrases around food;

- ❖ I am not very fond of liver (or whatever the food is) the way my mother prepares it, but perhaps the way you prepare it I will like it better.
- ❖ I have not learned to like liver, yet. (Yet is the important word here!)
- ❖ Learn how to say the word “Unfamiliar”. It is a very diplomatic and non-judgmental response to many questions- especially around food.

11. Sports:

- What is the history of soccer in your host country?
- What are the big rivalries?
- Do teenagers play sports as a part of school? If not, how do they get involved in sports?
- What are the opportunities to play sports for girls and women?

12. Rotary:

- What is the history of Rotary in your host country? Rotary was founded in Mexico in 1921.
- What are the boundaries of your host district? The district includes the states of Taxacala, Puebla and Guerrero. There are 58 clubs and 1,200 Rotarians.

- What is the history of your host club? How long have they been involved in Youth Exchange?
- How many members are in your host Rotary Club? Who many of them are women?
- Where do they meet? Wednesday. What time of day? 8:30 p.m.
- How many exchange students do they usually host every year?
- Where are the 2006-2007 exchange students hosted by your club from? How might you get in contact with them? Where are their current Outbound students? How might you get in contact with them? (They will be returning home as you arrive!)
- What local projects is your host club involved with? What international projects? Do they have a big fundraiser that you can help with?

A few other resources to get you started:

Books:

Material World- A Global Family Portrait by Peter Menzel, et al

Women in the Material World by Faith D'Aluisio and Peter Menzel

Xenophobes Guides: These are wonderful, humorous and irreverent looks at many cultures written by people not originally from that culture but who know it well as an outsider who has lived there. Even if there is no Xenophobes Guide to the country that you are going to, be sure that you look at the *Guide* to Americans or Canadians. It will give you some insights as to how we are seen by other cultures. To order you can go to www.xenophobes.com

Internet Sites:

Omniglot : <http://www.omniglot.com/language/index.htm> This website has great information on language and resources for learning languages.

Culture Grams: “Concise reliable and up-to-date country reports on 190 cultures of the world. Check to see if your school or local library subscribes to this wonderful resource. If not, you can order individual reports of your country for about \$4. www.culturegrams.com