

International Conversation Cafe

Lifestyle Topic: How to Survive in the USA

The U. S. Is not one culture, but many. It would be a mistake to assume every American is the same in their family, recreation, or in their relationships. If you pursue meaningful friendships with Americans, you both will grow in your appreciation for each other, the similarities and the differences.

Making friends

A good way to meet new friends on campus is to join a campus club or an interest group. For example, there may be a photography club.

What kind of club would you like to check out?

When you are introduced to someone it is usual to say "It's nice to meet you." Men usually shake hands with each other. If you are introduced to a woman wait for her to extend her hand if she wants to shake hands. Americans often say, "Hi, how are you?" But this question is not a serious request for information. It best to say "Fine," "okay," "I'm doing good." Americans have many people they know casually, but not many deep friends.

Have you had an experience where someone asked how you are, but did not wait for an answer?

What does friendship look like in your culture?

American may seem friendly when you first meet them, but not every American is interested in a deeper relationship. We all know that it takes time to develop a relationship and that person may not have the time. There are some relationships where it would be inappropriate to try to become close friends: with one's advisor, professor, medical doctor, or banker for example. Try to be sensitive and wise about personal cues as to what another person is feeling.

Honesty in relationships is important. If someone asks you to do something or go somewhere with them that you would rather not do or go to, it is better to say, "No, I am not interested," rather than saying yes and not showing up.

What do you do in your culture when you do not want to accept an invitation?

Tell about a successful and unsuccessful relationship with an American.

Making Conversation

How does one make conversation? Sports or the weather are good topics to start with. It is always good to know something about the university football team or the professional teams in the city so you can talk about them. You can ask, "Are you a fan of KSU football (for example)?" You can always ask people about their family. "How many brothers and sisters do you have?" is a good question. If they are married and not newly married, you can ask them about their children.

Some things to avoid are asking a person their age, commenting on how old or young they look, how much they weigh, asking them for whom they are going to vote or have voted for, or asking questions about money such as their salary or how much they paid for their car or house.

What topics are inappropriate to talk about in your culture?

If you can't understand what an American said, you can ask them to repeat themselves, but more slowly. If you really don't understand, ask them if they could write down some key words of their sentence. If they use an idiom you could say, "I haven't heard that phrase. What does it mean?" Someone might say, "I am feeling snowed under." You could ask them what it means.
What things have you heard Americans say that you did not understand?

Regarding dating in general, it is a good idea to go on group activities with men and women rather than to have a date with only one person. There are a lot of cultural barriers in dating so going on group activities is an easy way to enjoy knowing someone.
What are some dating norms in your culture?

Unique Opportunities

While in the United States, you may have rare opportunities. Traveling to another city or national park is wonderful. You may be invited to a friend's home to meet their parents and family. If someone invites you to go with them to church or an event, you may find an unique American experience.
What opportunities are you hoping for during your stay in the USA?

Money Issues

A student checking account with a debit card is necessary in the US. Ask if the bank requires a minimum balance in the account. Is there a service charge? Also ask how you can transfer money from overseas. Paypal can be a good service to transfer money from overseas. If you receive a check from someone, you can go to their bank and get cash for the check or if you know them you can deposit the check in your account. Nowadays most bank offer online deposits by taking a picture of the check. It is also helpful to have a credit card. One cannot rent a car without using a credit card. Is it probably best to already have the credit card before coming to the US because it is hard to get one here if one does not have a job.

Try it Out!

How would you start a conversation with a new classmate? What might you say?

If someone asks, "How did you spend your time last weekend?" What would you say?

If a student dropped her pen and didn't know it and was walking away, how would you address them?

If you are a female international student and a male American student asked you to go to a movie and you really didn't know him, what would you say?

If you are selling your laptop how should you ask for payment?

Tell about an awkward encounter with an American.