

Travel guru Rick Steves  
says travel with an  
open mind and ...

# Think globally



By Rick Steves

*Costco member Rick Steves, owner of Seattle-based Europe Through the Back Door, spends four months a year in Europe, writing guidebooks, leading tours and producing a popular public television series on travel. Here, he offers his opinions on how travel can help bring the world together.*

FOR MANY AMERICANS, the critical question nowadays is "How can we make America safer in the world?" I think we'd be safer by better understanding our world. A great first step is to travel—thoughtfully.

Thoughtful travel—becoming a "temporary local" to really get a break from our cultural norms—shows us how the world sees America. My travels have taught me that people around the world love the ideals of America and are inclined to like Americans even though they often disagree with our government.

Though many Americans travel, millions more don't venture out to see or experience the world. About 80 percent of Americans do not hold a passport. Many of those have worldviews based on little more than TV news. Travel gives us a firsthand look at the

complexity and struggles of the rest of the world, enabling us to digest news coverage more smartly.

Travel helps us celebrate, rather than fear, diversity. On a trip through Afghanistan, I was eating lunch in a Kabul cafeteria. An older man joined me with his lunch, intent on making one strong point. He said, "I am a professor here in Afghanistan. In this world, one-third of the people use a spoon and fork like you, one-third use chopsticks and one-third use fingers, like me. And we are all civilized."

Travel helps us appreciate the challenges other societies face. Stepping into a high school stadium in Turkey, I saw 500 teenagers punch the sky with their fists and shout, "We are a secular nation!" I asked my friend, "What's the deal? Don't they like God?" She said, "Sure, they love God. But here in Turkey, we treasure the separation of mosque and state as much as you value the separation of church and state. And, with Iran just to our east, we're concerned about the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism."

Travel shows us that Americans are among the haves in a have-not world. In con-

**Whether seeing the sights in Spain or sampling cheese in London, gaining a better understanding of the world can help create better, stronger and safer societies for us all, says travel expert Rick Steves.**

trast, nearly half of this world's people live on \$2 a day. And travel teaches you that, if you know what's good for you, you don't want to be filthy rich in a desperately poor world. It's just not a pretty picture.

Travel combats ethnocentrism. I was raised thinking the world is a pyramid with the United States on top and everyone else trying to get there. But as I traveled, I met intelligent people—living in countries nowhere near as rich, free or full of opportunity as America—who wouldn't trade passports with me. Rather than the American dream, they have the Nepalese, Bulgarian, Turkish or Nicaraguan dream.

Such cultural snapshots—the essential joy of travel—have made me both thankful to be an American and an enthusiastic citizen of the planet.

I have some Slovenian friends who muse that the world would be smart to establish a scholarship giving each American a free trip abroad as a high school graduation present. While they know that's unrealistic, they're convinced that if more Americans traveled before they voted, they would elect a government with policies that don't put us at odds with the rest of the world.

Travel gives us a perspective that can translate into American policies that will not alienate us from the family of nations. And when that happens, I believe we'll all be truly stronger, safer and better off. ☐



PHOTOS COURTESY OF EUROPE THROUGH THE BACK DOOR

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