

TOURISTS' STEREOTYPES - MORE OR LESS JUSTIFIED CLICHÉS



Each nationality has its own set of clichés... more or less justified. As the vacation time approaches, let's take a look at some of the best-known clichés with Laurent Tissot, a tourism historian and professor at the University of Neuchâtel in Switzerland.

"Germans Always Travel in Sandals"

The German tourist is often summed up by his or her look, and by one detail in particular: socks in open shoes. **This is an error of taste that can be traced back to the creation of Birkenstock shoes in 1774.** These almost orthopaedic shoes were designed to be as comfortable as possible. A century later, they were adopted by all Germans, with or without socks. When travel became more democratic at the end of the 1930s, German tourists proudly displayed their clogs. "Today, the stereotype applies to all the countries of northern Europe, from the Scandinavian peninsula to Denmark and the Netherlands," explains Laurent Tissot.

"The French Smell Bad"

No pun intended, but this is the stereotype that sticks to French travelers the most when they travel abroad. A reputation that they owe in fact to Louis XIV and his court. And for good reason, the Palace of Versailles was paradoxically the least clean place in the kingdom. The toilets were very basic and the baths rather rare. At the time, people were afraid that the water would transmit diseases," says Laurent Tissot. On the contrary, it was thought that dirt was protective. Instead of washing, the nobles and the king used to spray themselves with perfume...

"Italians Are Seductive"

It's a fact: Italians have the reputation of being real seducers, with a macho streak. "It's a question of culture," says the professor. "The Italian man is a social being. And it is often on this contact with the other and on the attraction that he exerts with his peers that he is considered in society," explains Laurent Tissot. The more successful he is, the more credit he will have with his peers. Moreover, "Italy is a very Catholic country and, for a long time, Catholicism did not leave much room for women," says the specialist.

"The Brits Drink Too Much"

The British are known to be heavy drinkers. With good reason? According to several scientific studies carried out in recent years, they are among the biggest drinkers in the world. The first drinking places, the tabernae, taverns that offered board and lodging to travelers, appeared during the Roman Empire and served mostly a barley-based drink, a sort of ancestor of beer. Very quickly, these places, Ale Houses, as they were then called in the Middle Ages, developed throughout England. In 1393, they became pubs - short for public houses - when King Richard II forced them to make themselves known to the public by placing a distinctive sign - a stick, a piece of wood or a tree branch - above the entrance door. The pub is therefore an institution that is two thousand years old. Among the other explanations identified by the historian: the weather. "Alcohol helps to forget the bad weather and the cold," explains the historian. "That's why this cliché also concerns the Bretons.

"Americans Are Uneducated"

The United States is a machine of fantasies and stereotypes. One of the most stubborn of these is their supposed lack of culture. Americans would go so far as to think that London is... the capital of Spain. "There are several explanations for this," says the expert. "First of all, the history of the United States is dated - roughly - to 1492, the discovery of the continent by Christopher Columbus. This is very young compared to Great Britain or France, for example. In reality, the history of America begins with the first migrations of peoples from Asia during prehistoric times, but these peoples lived isolated from the "Old World" until its arrival."

The second reason for this reputation abroad is the size of the country. Imagine: the United States is 17 times the size of France. No wonder it takes a little longer to get interested in the geography of the world when you live in a country that big. Last but not least, since the Cold War and until about ten years ago, the United States was the only world superpower. A title that reinforced their patriotic feeling.

"The Chinese Don't Mind Manners"

As seen in Europe, the Chinese are not known for their refinement. Known for drinking and eating noisily, for farting, spitting and burping without embarrassment in public, they clash with our Western codes. "This is also a question of culture, according to the researcher. "China has remained inward-looking for a very long time. It's only been a little over twenty years since the country opened up and its inhabitants started to travel. So they don't always know the codes of the countries they visit. In addition, most of them speak little or no English, which can further hinder their integration. In any case, the subject is well known and worries the Chinese leaders. On several occasions in recent years, the government has even launched publicity campaigns urging tourists to be more polite when they travel abroad.

"The Japanese Are Very (Too?) Civilized"

They have the upper hand. While the Germans have the reputation of being old-fashioned, the French for smelling bad and the Americans for being uneducated, Japanese travelers are "too civilized" in the eyes of the world, says the tourism specialist. And for good reason, **"the rules of politeness in Japanese culture, inspired by the Shinto religion (ancient beliefs) and the Samurai Code, preach respect for good manners in a rather strict manner.** Centuries later, the legacy of these precepts persists. Anyone who has ever ridden the subway in Japan can confirm this! Another reason for this courtesy, or even this excessive rigour, is that Japan is dependent on the culture of shame. From a very young age at school, the Japanese are taught - with humiliating sanctions - order and humility. The result: beware if you dare to overtake someone in a queue!

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