

Section 8 Dealing with other cultures

In this section

As a tour guide in this jointly managed national park you are working with Jawoyn people and are aware of Jawoyn culture through your training and through Sections 1 and 3 of this handbook.

However, cross-cultural communication is not just about interacting with Aboriginal people. Many of the visitors to Nitmiluk National Park are from other countries and you need to be sensitive to their needs.

The aim of this section is to make you aware of, and sensitive to, some of the cultural differences you may encounter while dealing with international visitors to Nitmiluk. This section is about:

- people visiting Australia
- communicating with international visitors.

About people visiting Australia

Australia prides itself in being a friendly place for tourists. Visitors love the place and most have a wonderful and memorable time.

However not all international tourist experiences are as good as they could be. One of the reasons for this is insensitivity to cultural differences.

Problems in cross-cultural interaction can happen when people assume that the way they behave is appropriate and normal for everyone. They are not aware that certain behaviours may offend and can cause embarrassment and discomfort to visitors.

Also, sometimes guides do not appreciate visitors from particular countries or cultural groups because they consider their behaviour to be strange or rude.

Tourists from other countries and cultures may only have a very basic understanding of the English language, or perhaps no English at all. They arrive with individual behaviour patterns, expectations, needs and preferences based on their cultural conditioning. For example:

What Nitmiluk tour guides need to know

What can you do to help visitors from non-English speaking countries understand you?

What are five key considerations for communicating with people from Asian countries?

What are five key considerations for communicating with people from European countries?

Information source

The information in this section was provided for the handbook by Klem Hedenig, Employee Assistance Service NT.

Cross-cultural dealings

How can problems in cross-cultural communication occur?

What is culture?

Culture is learned behaviour.

Culture is the distinctive way of life of people united by shared beliefs.

Culture is the arts, customs and institutions of a nation, people, or group.

What is ethnocentrism?

The belief that one's own cultural patterns are superior to all others.

Cross-cultural communication

How can you help visitors to understand what you are saying?

What is stereotyping?

Creating an oversimplified image of a group of people, usually by assuming that all members of the group are alike. For example, assumptions like all French people eat frog legs, all Swiss can yodel and all Australians like cricket.

- what is acceptable in one culture may be unacceptable in another, i.e. male and female holding hands or touching in public
- what is okay in one culture may not be allowed in another, i.e. showing too much 'flesh' or wearing tight clothing
- what is polite in one culture can be rude in another, i.e. looking people in the eyes when talking to them.

It would take several books to provide adequate advice about cross-cultural communications, particularly with all of the different people visiting Australia. Providing the necessary details is therefore beyond the scope of this handbook. However, hopefully, the following will help you be more aware of, and sensitive to, cultural differences by providing a quick look at two broad groups of visitors.

International visitors

General points to consider when communicating with international visitors:

- please speak slowly. Australians tend to speak very quickly - slow down to give visitors a chance to translate what you have said into their own language
- please do not use slang (like cossies, mossies, sunnies, dunnies, stubbies, snapping handbags). Australians already speak with an accent and the language we use is often quite different from the English visitors may have learned in school. Stick to simple words and short sentences
- do not raise your voice to people who do not understand you; they usually have language difficulties, not hearing problems
- avoid talking about religion, politics and sex. Visitors may have strong views or be sensitive about these topics
- be careful with jokes. Jokes do not translate very well and the funny bits are often lost. People's sense of humour also varies. It is best to avoid jokes altogether
- be careful of stereotyping. Consider all clients firstly as individuals
- do not make derogatory remarks about other people on the river, for example swimmers and canoeists.

Asian visitors

When communicating with visitors from Asian countries:

- show respect. Use a formal way of addressing people, like Sir or Madam, or Mr.... if you know their name. Using first names is considered too intimate
- be sensitive when responding to questions. Keep in mind that Asians may be able to speak, but not read, English
- do not touch them (i.e. a pat on the arm) and keep a polite distance away when talking with them. Touching may be considered rude
- avoid direct eye contact for extended periods. Speak with eyes slightly averted, particularly when addressing the opposite sex
- handshaking may be considered unacceptable, particularly by older generations
- many Asians are very sophisticated and highly educated. Do not confuse language difficulties with lack of knowledge or incompetence
- many people from Asia are not used to 'personalised attention' as service staff in their countries often deal with more than one person simultaneously. Do not be offended if an Asian visitor interrupts while you are attending to someone else
- a professional neat, clean, tidy appearance is essential. It shows that you respect your customers (and yourself)
- if a misunderstanding occurs, a sincere apology is much more important than a detailed explanation or excuse
- many Asians do not use 'please' and 'thank you' as often as Australians. They consider frequent use of 'please' and 'thank you' as insincere.

Cross-cultural communication

What are some of the things to be aware of when communicating with Asian people?

What is cultural sensitivity?

Being open to learning about and accepting different cultural groups.

Cross-cultural communication

What are some of the things you should be aware of when communicating with European people?

European visitors

When communicating with visitors from European countries:

- be friendly and show interest
- Europeans tend to expect fast and efficient service. They may feel insulted if you ask them to wait without an explanation
- do not confuse 'efficiency' with 'haste'. Take enough time to explain unfamiliar terms and answer questions politely
- be prepared for rather abrupt and direct questions
- maintain a degree of 'friendly formality'
- whenever possible give precise information, i.e. we are leaving in 35 minutes, not we are leaving in a little while
- know what you are talking about. Europeans may want to know intricate details about anything and everything. If you do not know the answer, do not make one up, try to find out and tell them later
- a professional clean, tidy appearance is essential.

Cross-cultural communication

What are some of the ways in which the behaviour or expectations of Asians and Europeans differ?

In summary

Being culturally sensitive and aware does not require you to lose your identity as an Australian. But you must project an image of professionalism, flexibility, competence, empathy and care to ensure your clients enjoy their tour.

- international visitors want to experience Australia's attractions and culture in a safe, friendly and supportive atmosphere
- international visitors wish to be treated with empathy and respect
- what seems sensible, important and reasonable to a person in one culture may seem irrational, stupid and / or unimportant in another culture
- professional tourism staff must take the visitor's particular needs and cultural sensitivities into account when communicating with them
- visitors may not be familiar with the English (Australian) language or the Australian culture
- do not think that visitors are stupid (or deaf) because they cannot speak English
- use plain English and pronounce words clearly
- rephrase what you said if you were not understood
- be patient, friendly and relaxed
- listen actively – by hearing what your client is saying you can better meet their needs (and can learn something from them)
- be mindful of your own attitudes about different cultures
- check that your humour does not belittle others and is not sexist or racist
- smiling is the universal signal of friendliness and is understood by everyone.

What is empathy?

Feeling of concern and understanding for another's situation or feelings.

Section 8 Assessment questions

You must answer all of the questions at the end of each section of this handbook and complete a practical assessment before you can conduct launch (boat) tours on Katherine Gorge.

Following are the questions that you must answer as part of your assessment for this section.

Please write your answers on the form in Section 9 of this handbook.

1. What can you do to help visitors from non-English speaking countries understand you?
2. What are five key considerations for communicating with people from Asian countries?
3. What are five key considerations for communicating with people from European countries?