



The British v Latin American Culture

0'00

Hello everyone! I'm Hannah, an English teacher from Virtually Fluent and today I'm going to talk about why my experience of understanding and learning a culture is an important part of learning a language too.

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So I've been trying to learn Spanish over the last few years and I have realised that learning the culture, understanding the culture of the language is a really important part of the learning process. And today I'm going to talk about my experience of visiting Latin American countries in order to help me improve my Spanish.

0'49

Now, before I started learning Spanish I actually didn't really know that much about the Spanish or Latin American culture. And it was only about six years ago, just when I was starting the language, I met my partner who is from South America, from Ecuador. And ever since meeting him, I've obviously had the opportunity to go and visit South American countries. Now I have only visited Ecuador and Mexico so far so I certainly don't generalise today and talk about the whole Latin American community. I would love to visit more countries post-COVID but for today I'm going to talk about my experiences having visited Ecuador and Mexico.

1'30

Now, the first big thing that I recognised immediately upon landing in Ecuador was the friendliness, the warmth and the welcoming of the people. Now here in the UK, we are quite cold people, we're quite distant. When we meet people for the first time, it's normally a handshake and it's quite formal language but this was completely different when I landed in Quito airport. My boyfriend and his family were all there to welcome me, everybody around was so happy, so friendly, lots of hugging and kissing, which is not something that's particularly typical here in the UK. Now, this warmth and friendliness continued throughout my journey in Ecuador and also when I was in Mexico.

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I remember particularly, we went on an excursion to the Amazon and there was a group of small children there. They'd never really seen the blonde hair and blue eyes and they were so friendly, hugging and kissing and asking lots of questions, they wanted photos with me. And that's something that you would never really get here in the UK or, in fact, in any European country, so it was just a nice feeling to feel that in the Latin American communities.

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And these things, such as kissing on the cheeks and being friendly and warm is not something that you learn from a textbook. When I was learning Spanish, it never says anything about this, it's only by being in the culture and meeting people there that you actually learn these little things.

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Now, the second biggest thing for me, which was a huge difference, was, of course, the food and the drink. The culture was very different there. So here in the UK, the main meal of the day is traditionally dinner. The whole family sit down and have a big dinner together and this is the important meal. Lunch and breakfast are normally a lot smaller. In fact, lunch is typically just a sandwich or a salad to keep you going through the day. When I was in South America, lunch was the main meal of the day. My partner's family would stop work, stop what they were doing at lunchtime and come together for a big lunch. The family would meet and have a big lunch. For me, this was something completely different. Lunch was always just a five-minute snack to get through the day.

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The meal times were also very different. So, we generally eat a lot earlier here in the UK. In Latin America, my experience was everything was open a lot later, so restaurants opened a lot later, and the busiest times in restaurants were a lot later than they would be here in the UK.

4'09

Now something I also found quite interesting was the freshness of all the food. I'm not a big fish or seafood eater but certainly a lot of our friends and family in Latin America loved seafood, everything was fresh from the seas around them. We do, of course, have fresh food here in the UK too but the typical meals are quite stodgy. Think of a roast (Sunday roast), think of fish and chips, everything is in batter and oil, it's quite heavy food. And my experience was that it was a lot lighter over in South America.

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And also the fruit juices, they were amazing! So fresh and they were made right in front of you. And fruit juices here in the UK (fresh juices) are really really expensive and it would be a snackbar or a juice bar where you can buy these. You could just find them in every restaurant, on every street in Latin America and that was something so nice. Although I remember sitting down for lunch and the typical thing that you would order with your meal would be a fruit juice. Here in the UK, most people would probably order a glass of wine instead.

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Something I really enjoyed about the food in Latin America was the street food. You could just walk down any street and you would see vendors with carts, I remember eating endless tacos in Mexico and that's something quite different, local people just cooking the things that they love, the traditional food. Here in the UK, street food does exist if you're in the city centre, in the tourist attractions you can always find street food. Very different though, from different cuisines around the world. You often find crepes or pizzas, and it was a completely different feeling.

5'52

And, of course, I cannot comment on the cultural differences of food and drink without mentioning tea. So here in the UK we are obsessed with tea. I could not live a day without a proper cup of tea and when I first arrived in South America we were meeting my boyfriend's parents and having a big breakfast together and, of course, asked for a cup of tea with milk and everyone was shocked, no idea why this was. Of course, we have black tea here and then we add milk. So, first it was really difficult even in the supermarkets to find the brands that we have here in the UK, Tetleys Tea, Yorkshire Tea, and, of course, having milk. In the UK, milk is very fresh, we have lots of farms, cows around to give us milk. In South America it was mostly UHT milk from the supermarkets that we bought. So again, all these little things were very different, not something that I ever would have known without travelling to the countries.

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Now the next big thing that I really enjoyed from being in Latin America was the architecture. There's a complete mix of architecture. You have all the traditional buildings that were built by the indigenous people and then you have this influence from the Spanish when they came over to South America. And this mix of the traditional architecture and then this grandeur with all this gold, it was really interesting, not something that you would see here in Europe.

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We did quite a lot of touring through little villages and cities when we were in Ecuador and Mexico and I always found that the churches or the equivalent religious building was always a really important part of the community no matter how few a people were living in a particular village or a town. Every church we went into, it was full, there were so many people there and my experience in the UK is completely different. Of course, we have the typical tourist attractions (cathedrals and churches) but in my experience, here in the UK, churches don't play as big a role in small communities as what I experienced in Latin America.

8'00

Then there was the music and the passion that people have for music in Latin America is amazing! Something very very different to here in the UK. You always hear salsa or samba or bachata music in the background and people actually dance to it, in the corner of a restaurant or down a the beach, it's a really nice feeling, a passion that people have for music and they really seem to understand it, the rhythm and the beats of the music. Here in the UK, certainly in restaurants and bars music is sort of background music, something that you hear but nobody is dancing and nobody is listening to it, everyone is conversing instead. So this was something completely different.

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When I was in Ecuador and in Mexico, it was also at Christmas time so we had lots of parties, Christmas and New Year parties, also meeting my boyfriend's family. So it was really good fun, lots of music and people understand the dance, they want to dance, they invite you to dance, which was a really really nice experience.

9'03

And the final thing I want to talk about, which is great as a tourist, is the different regions that you have in all of the countries - different climates, different weath, it's amazing! You could be a backpacker, you could be an adventure-goer, you could be a beach-goer, and you have everything in the countries. I remember in Ecuador we did a lot of touring around the different regions. We went over to the beach, which was very humid, gorgeous weather, all the sandy beaches, lots of seafood, lots of drinking. Of course we went through the Cordillera de los Andes and here everything is very high, it's a very dry climate, we didn't spend too much time there with the altitude, but it's very very different, you can do a lot of walking and beautiful views of all the mountains around. And then you go down into the cities, which is quite a dry climate and it's a very different feeling, people are working, people are busy, lots of houses built on top of each other and you've got the rainforest as well, which is very humid. We had some amazing experiences watching the rain fall pretty heavily in the Amazon. So you have all these different

climates even within one country and as a tourist it's amazing to be able to experience all these different types of holidays just in one country.

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Now culture is a really really important part of learning a language. If you're using a textbook or taking classes with a teacher you're not really learning the full language because culture is a little part of a language. Through my experience of being a tourist and now family, to Latin America, you learn so many things that are not available in textbooks, in online courses. I learn typical phrases and expressions from native speakers themselves, I also learnt the typical vocabulary for food and drink, the typical fruits that they have there, and that's not something you can ever learn in a textbook. So my Spanish improved vastly, just by experiencing those cultures and trying to learn more about the cultures. You also understand the language a little bit more because the way that people express things and the formality that they use is reflected in the languages and by understanding the culture a bit better you can understand the language, the theory behind the language too. Now, this is something really important if you're learning English as a foreign language. It's not just to learn the vocabulary and practise your listening and reading and grammar skills, it's to try and be interested in and find out more about the cultures behind the language - The British culture, the American culture, the Australian culture.

11'56

Now I do have a weekly blog that I release on my website, you can easily subscribe to this for for, the link to this is in the description below. And here, we explain exactly that, we talk about important parts of the British culture that you might not find in a textbook, in an online English course. We look at typical phrases and expressions used by native English speakers, and, of course, the important topics (the television, the radio, cooking) - what do people do in the UK? So come and take a look at our weekly blog, you can subscribe using the link in the description below. So hopefully that's provided a little bit of insight into how culture can really be important as part of a language. This is Hannah from Virtually Fluent, bringing English to life.