

Culture Wise **ENGLAND**

The Essential Guide to Culture,
Customs & Business Etiquette

David Hampshire & Liz Opalka





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26 York Street, London W1U 6PZ, United Kingdom
☎ +44 (0)20-7788 7644, ☎ +44 (0)870-762 3212
✉ info@survivalbooks.net
🌐 www.survivalbooks.net

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THE AUTHORS

David Hampshire was born in England and after serving in the Royal Air Force, was employed for many years in the computer industry. His work has taken him around the world and he has lived and worked in many countries, including Australia, France, Germany, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Panama, Singapore, Spain, and Switzerland. David started working as a technical author in Australia in the '80s and he became a full-time, freelance writer in 1990. He is the author or co-author of over 15 titles, including *Living and Working in Britain* and *Buying or Renting a Home in London*. David lives with his partner in England and Panama.

Liz Opalka was born in England of Hungarian parents. She trained as a journalist and was initially worked for local newspapers in west London, but is now employed in public relations. She has travelled extensively throughout Asia, South America and Europe, and after graduating, spent a year living in Italy teaching English. In her spare time, Liz enjoys watching her football team, Queen's Park Rangers (at least on the rare occasions when they win). Liz lives in London, but helps keep the railway network afloat with frequent visits to the north-west of England, where her partner is based. This is her first book.

WHAT READERS & REVIEWERS HAVE

‘If you need to find out how France works then this book is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions.’

Living France

‘It’s everything you always wanted to ask but didn’t for fear of the contemptuous put down. The best English-language guide. Its pages are stuffed with practical information on everyday subjects and are designed to compliment the traditional guidebook.’

Swiss News

‘Rarely has a ‘survival guide’ contained such useful advice. This book dispels doubts for first-time travellers, yet is also useful for seasoned globetrotters. In a word, if you’re planning to move to the US or go there for a long-term stay, then buy this book both for general reading and as a ready-reference.’

American Citizens Abroad

‘Let’s say it at once. David Hampshire’s Living and Working in France is the best handbook ever produced for visitors and foreign residents in this country; indeed, my discussion with locals showed that it has much to teach even those born and bred in l’Hexagone. It is Hampshire’s meticulous detail which lifts his work way beyond the range of other books with similar titles. Often you think of a supplementary question and search for the answer in vain. With Hampshire this is rarely the case. He writes with great clarity (and gives French equivalents of all key terms), a touch of humour and a ready eye for the odd (and often illuminating) fact. This book is absolutely indispensable.’

The Riviera Reporter

‘A must for all future expats. I invested in several books but this is the only one you need. Every issue and concern is covered, every daft question you have but are frightened to ask is answered honestly without pulling any punches. Highly recommended.’

Reader

‘In answer to the desert island question about the one how-to book on France, this book would be it.’

The Recorder

‘The ultimate reference book. Every subject imaginable is exhaustively explained in simple terms. An excellent introduction to fully enjoy all that this fine country has to offer and save time and money in the process.’

American Club of Zurich

SAID ABOUT SURVIVAL BOOKS

‘The amount of information covered is not short of incredible. I thought I knew enough about my birth country. This book has proved me wrong. Don’t go to France without it. Big mistake if you do. Absolutely priceless!’

Reader

‘When you buy a model plane for your child, a video recorder, or some new computer gizmo, you get with it a leaflet or booklet pleading ‘Read Me First’, or bearing large friendly letters or bold type saying ‘IMPORTANT – follow the instructions carefully’. This book should be similarly supplied to all those entering France with anything more durable than a 5-day return ticket. It is worth reading even if you are just visiting briefly, or if you have lived here for years and feel totally knowledgeable and secure. But if you need to find out how France works then it is indispensable. Native French people probably have a less thorough understanding of how their country functions. Where it is most essential, the book is most up to the minute.’

Living France

A comprehensive guide to all things French, written in a highly readable and amusing style, for anyone planning to live, work or retire in France.

The Times

Covers every conceivable question that might be asked concerning everyday life. I know of no other book that could take the place of this one.

France in Print

A concise, thorough account of the do’s and don’ts for a foreigner in Switzerland. Crammed with useful information and lightened with humorous quips which make the facts more readable.

American Citizens Abroad

‘I found this a wonderful book crammed with facts and figures, with a straightforward approach to the problems and pitfalls you are likely to encounter. The whole laced with humour and a thorough understanding of what’s involved. Gets my vote!’

Reader

‘A vital tool in the war against real estate sharks; don’t even think of buying without reading this book first!’

Everything Spain

‘We would like to congratulate you on this work: it is really super! We hand it out to our expatriates and they read it with great interest and pleasure.’

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Cattistock, Dorset

INTRODUCTION

If you're planning a trip to England or just want to learn more about the country, you'll find the information contained in *Culture Wise England* invaluable. Whether you're travelling on business or pleasure, visiting for a few days or planning to stay for a lifetime, Culture Wise guides enable you to quickly find your feet by removing the anxiety factor when dealing with a foreign culture.

Culture Wise England is essential reading for anyone planning to visit England, including tourists (particularly travellers planning to stay a number of weeks or months), business people, migrants, retirees, holiday homeowners and transferees. It's designed to help newcomers avoid cultural and social gaffes; make friends and influence people; improve communications (both verbal and non-verbal); and enhance your understanding of England and the English people. It explains what to expect, how to behave in most situations, and how to get along with the locals and feel at home – rather than feeling like a fish out of water. It isn't, however, simply a monologue of dry facts and figures, but a practical and entertaining look at life in England – as it really is – and not necessarily as the tourist brochures would have you believe.

Adjusting to a different environment and culture in any foreign country can be a traumatic and stressful experience, and England is no exception. You need to adapt to new customs and traditions, and discover the English way of doing things; whether it's sharing a few bevies with your pals down the boozier after a hard week's graft, having Rosie Lee with the trouble and strife and pie and liquor, or going for a chicken masala at your local Indian. England is a land where many things are done differently: where not only do people drive on the left (which can be disconcerting if you usually drive on the right), they drink their tea with milk and their beer warm, and where 'flying the English flag' is politically incorrect and may be construed as racist.

A period spent in England is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, and hopefully expand your circle of friends. We trust this book will help you avoid the pitfalls of visiting or living in England and smooth your way to a happy and rewarding stay.

Good luck!

David Hampshire & Liz Opalka
July 2007



1.

ADAPTING TO A
NEW CULTURE

With almost daily advances in technology, ever-cheaper flights and knowledge about almost anywhere in the world at our fingertips, travelling, living, working and retiring abroad has never been more accessible. Current migration patterns also suggest that it has never been more popular. But, although globalisation means the world has in effect ‘shrunk’, every country is still a ‘world’ of its own, each with a unique culture.

Some people find it impossible to adapt to a new life in a different culture – for reasons which are many and varied. According to statistics, partner dissatisfaction is the most common cause; non-working spouses frequently find themselves without a role in the new country, and sometimes with little to do other than think about what they would be doing if they were at home. Family concerns – which may include the children’s education and worries about loved ones at home – can also deeply affect those living abroad.

Many factors contribute to how well you adapt to a new culture, for example, your personality, education, foreign language skills, mental health, maturity, socio-economic conditions, travel experience, and family and social support systems. How you handle the stress of change, and bring balance and meaning to your life, is the principal indicator of how well you’ll adjust to a different country, culture and business environment.

‘There are no foreign lands. It is the traveller only who is foreign.’

Robert Louis Stevenson
(Scottish writer)

ENGLAND IS DIFFERENT

Many people underestimate the cultural isolation that can be experienced in a foreign country, particularly one with a different language. Even in a country where you speak the language fluently, you’ll find that many aspects of the culture are surprisingly foreign, despite the cosy familiarity

engendered by cinema, television and books. England is perceived by many foreigners as an ‘easy’ option, because it is part of the European Union, English is spoken, it has a multicultural society, and there are well established foreign communities in all the large towns and cities.



However, when you move to England, you'll need to adapt to a totally new environment and new challenges; these may include a new job, a new home and a new physical environment, which can be overwhelming – and all this before you even encounter the local culture. In your home country, you may have left a job where you were the boss, were extremely competent, and knew everyone. In England, you may be virtually a trainee (especially if your English isn't fluent) and not know any of your colleagues. The sensation that you're starting from scratch can be demoralising.

Even if you move to a major city, many things that you're used to and take for granted in your home country may not be available in England, e.g. certain kinds of food, opportunities to enjoy your favourite hobby or sport, and books and television programmes in your

own language. Over time, this lack of 'home comforts' can wear you down. You will also have to contend with the lack of a local support network. At home you have a circle of friends, acquaintances, colleagues and possibly relatives you can rely on for help and support. In England there's no such network, which, until you make new friends, can leave you feeling lost.

The degree of isolation you feel usually depends on how long you plan to spend in England and what you will be doing there. If you're simply going on a short holiday, you may not even be aware of many of the cultural differences; although if you are, it will enhance your enjoyment, and may save you from a few embarrassing or confusing moments. However, if you're planning a business trip, or intend to spend an extended period in England – perhaps working, studying or even living there permanently – **it's essential to understand the culture, customs and etiquette at the earliest opportunity.**

'If you reject the food, ignore the customs, fear the religion and avoid the people, you might better stay at home.'

James A. Michener (American writer)

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is the term used to describe the psychological and physical state felt by people when arriving in a foreign country, or even moving to a new environment in their home country (where the

'When you travel, remember that a foreign country is not designed to make you comfortable. It is designed to make its own people comfortable.'

Clifton Fadiman (American writer)

culture, and in some cases language, may vary considerably by region and social class). Culture shock can be experienced when travelling, living, working or studying abroad, when in addition to adapting to new social rules and values, you may need to adjust to a different climate, food and dress. It can manifest itself in a lack of direction and the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things, not knowing what's appropriate or inappropriate. You literally feel like a 'fish out of water'.

Culture shock is precipitated by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar rules of behaviour and cues to social intercourse – the thousand and one clues to behaviour in everyday situations: when to shake hands and what to say when we meet people; how to buy goods and services; when and how much to tip; how to use a cash machine or the telephone; when to accept and refuse invitations; and when to take statements seriously and when not to. These cues, which may be words, gestures or facial expressions, are acquired in the course of our life, and are as much a part of our culture and customs as the language we speak, and our beliefs. Our peace of mind and social efficiency depend on these cues, most of which are unconsciously recognised.

The symptoms of culture shock are essentially psychological, and are caused by the sense of alienation you feel when you're bombarded on a daily basis by cultural differences, in an environment where there are few, if any, familiar references. However, there can also be physical symptoms, including an increased incidence of minor illnesses (e.g. colds and headache), and more serious psychosomatic illnesses, brought on by depression. You shouldn't underestimate the consequences of culture shock, although the effects can be lessened if you accept the condition rather than deny it.

Stages of Culture Shock

Severe culture shock is often experienced when moving to a country with a different language. It usually follows a number of stages. The names may vary, as will the symptoms and effects, but a typical progression is as follows:

1. The first stage is commonly known as the 'honeymoon' stage, and usually lasts from a few



days to a few weeks after arrival (although it can last longer, particularly if you're insulated from the usual pressures of life). This stage is essentially a positive (even euphoric) one, when a newcomer finds everything an exciting and interesting novelty. The feeling is similar to being on holiday or on a short trip abroad, when you generally experience only the positive effects of culture shock (although this depends very much on where you're from and the country you're visiting – see box).

Paris Syndrome

Every year, a dozen or so Japanese tourists have to be repatriated from the French capital after falling prey to what has become known as 'Paris Syndrome'. This is what some polite Japanese tourists suffer when they discover that Parisians can be rude, or that the city doesn't meet their expectations. The experience can be so stressful that they suffer a nervous breakdown, and need to be hospitalised or repatriated under medical supervision.

2. The second stage, rejection or distress, is usually completely opposite to the first; and is essentially negative and a period of crisis. It can occur as the initial excitement and holiday feeling wears off, and you start to cope with the real conditions of daily life – except of course that life is nothing like anything you've previously experienced. This can happen

after only a few weeks, and is characterised by a general feeling of disorientation, confusion and loneliness. Physical exhaustion, brought on by a change of time zone, extremes of hot or cold, and the strain of having hundreds of settling-in tasks to accomplish, is an important symptom of this stage. You may also experience regression, where you spend much of your time speaking your own language, watching television and reading newspapers from your home country, eating food from home, and socialising with expatriates who speak your language. You may also spend a lot of time complaining about the host country and its culture. Your home environment suddenly assumes a tremendous importance, and is irrationally glorified. All difficulties and problems are forgotten and only the good things back home are remembered.

Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth





London Eye

3. The third stage is often known as the 'flight' stage because of the overwhelming desire to escape. It is usually the one that lasts the longest, and is the most difficult to cope with. During this period, you may feel depressed and angry, as well as resentful towards the new country and its people. You may experience difficulties such as not being understood, and feelings of discontent, impatience, frustration, sadness and incompetence. These feelings are inevitable when you're trying to adapt to a new culture that's very different from that of your home country; and they're exacerbated by the fact that you can see nothing positive or good about the new country, and focus exclusively on the negative aspects, refusing to acknowledge

The transition between your old culture and customs and those of your new country is a difficult one and takes time to complete. During this process, strong feelings of dissatisfaction may emerge. The period of readjustment can last six months, although there are expatriates who adjust earlier and (although rare) those who never get over the 'flight' stage and are forced to return home.

any positive points. You may become hostile, and develop an aggressive attitude towards the country. Other people will sense this, and in many cases either respond in a confrontational manner or try to avoid you. There may be problems with the language, your house, job or children's school, transportation, driving on the 'wrong' side of the road... even simple tasks like shopping may be fraught with problems, and the fact that the locals are largely indifferent to all these problems only makes matter worse. They try to help, but they just don't understand your concerns, and you conclude that they must be insensitive and unsympathetic to you and your problems.

4. The fourth stage, recovery or autonomy, is where you begin to integrate and adjust to the new culture, and accept the customs of the country as simply another way of living. **The environment doesn't change, what changes**

is your attitude towards it.

You become more competent with the language, and you also feel more comfortable with the customs of the host country, and can move around without feeling anxious. However, you still have problems with some of the social cues, and you won't understand everything people say, particularly colloquialisms and idioms. Nevertheless, you have largely adjusted to the new culture, and start to feel more at home and familiar with the country and your place in it, and begin to realise that it has its good as well as bad points.

5. The fifth stage is termed 'reverse culture shock' and occurs when you return to your home country. You may find that many things have changed (you will certainly have changed) and that you feel like a foreigner in your own country. If you've been away for a long time and have become comfortable with the habits and customs of a new lifestyle, you may find that you no longer feel at ease in your homeland. Reverse culture shock can be difficult to deal with, and some people find it impossible to re-adapt to their home country after living abroad for a number of years.

'The whole object of travel is not to set foot on foreign land; it is at last to set foot on one's own country as a foreign land.'

G. K. Chesterton (English writer)



Whitby Abbey, Yorkshire

The above stages occur at different times depending on the individual and his circumstances, and everyone has his own way of reacting to them. Some stages last longer, and are more difficult to cope with than others, while others are shorter and easier to overcome.

Reducing the Effects

Experts agree that almost everyone suffers from culture shock and there's no escaping the phenomenon; however, its negative effects can be reduced considerably, and there are a number of things you can do before leaving home:

- **Positive attitude** – The key to reducing the negative effects of culture shock is to have a positive attitude towards England, whether you're visiting or planning to live there. If you don't look forward to a trip or relocation, you should question why you're going. There's no greater guarantee of unhappiness

'Travellers never think that
THEY are the foreigners.'

Mason Cooley (American aphorist)

in a foreign environment than taking your prejudices with you. It's important when trying to adapt to a new culture to be sensitive to the locals' feelings, and try to put yourself in their shoes wherever possible, which will help you understand why they react as they do. Bear in mind that they have a strong, in-bred cultural code, just as you do, and react in certain ways because they're culturally 'trained' to do so. If you find yourself frustrated by an aspect of the local culture or behaviour, the chances are that they will be equally puzzled by yours.

- **Research** – Discover as much as possible about England before you go, so that your arrival and settling-in period doesn't spring as many surprises as it will if you don't do your homework. Reading up on England and its culture before you leave home will help you familiarise yourself with the local customs, and make the country and its people seem less strange on arrival. You will be aware of many of the differences between England and your homeland, and be better prepared to deal with them. This will help you to avoid being upset by real or imaginary cultural slights, and also reduce the chance of you

offending the locals by cultural misunderstandings. Being prepared for a certain amount of disorientation and confusion makes it easier to cope with it. There are literally hundreds of publications about England, as well as dozens of websites for expatriates (see **Appendices B and C**), many of which provide access to expatriates already living in England, who can answer questions and provide useful advice. There are also 'notice boards' on many websites where you can post messages or questions.

- **Visit England first** – If you're planning to live or work in England for a number of years, or even permanently, it's important to visit the country to see whether you think you would enjoy living there, and would be able to cope with the culture before making the leap. Before you go, try to find people in your home country who have visited England, and talk to them about it. Some companies organise briefings for families before departure. Rent a property before





buying a home, and don't burn your bridges until you're sure that you have made the right decision.

- **Learn English** – As well as a positive attitude, overcoming the language barrier will be the most decisive factor in combating culture shock and enjoying your time in England. The ability to speak English and understand the local vernacular (see **Chapter 5**) isn't just a useful tool – that will allow you to buy what you need, find your way around, etc. – but is the key to understanding England and its culture. If you can speak English, even at a basic level, your scope for making friends is immediately widened. Obviously, not everyone is a linguist, and learning English can take time and requires motivation. However, with sufficient perseverance, virtually anyone can learn enough English to participate in the local culture.

- **Be proactive** – Join in the activities of the local people, which could be a carnival, a religious festival or a sporting activity. There are often local clubs where you can play sport or keep fit, be artistic, learn to cook local dishes, taste wine, etc. Not only will this fill some of your spare time, giving you less time to miss home, but you'll also meet new people and make friends. If you feel you cannot join a local club – perhaps because your English isn't good enough – you can always participate in activities for expatriates, of which there are many in the major cities. You should look upon a period spent in England as an opportunity to redefine your life objectives, and learn and acquire new perspectives. Culture shock can help you develop a better understanding of yourself and stimulate your creativity.
- **Talk to other expatriates** – Although they may deny it, many expatriates have been through exactly what you're experiencing, and faced the same feelings of disorientation. Even

Culture shock is an unavoidable part of travelling, living and working abroad, but if you're aware of it and take steps to lessen its effects before you go and while you're abroad, the period of adjustment will be shortened and its negative and depressing consequences reduced.

if they cannot give you advice, it helps to know that you aren't alone, and that it gets better over time. However, don't make the mistake of mixing only with expatriates, as this will alienate you from the local culture and make it much harder to integrate. Don't rely on social contact with your compatriots to carry you through, because it won't.

- **Keep in touch with home** – Keeping in touch with your family and friends at home and around the world by telephone, email and letters, will help reduce and overcome the effects of culture shock.
- **Be happy** – Don't rely on others to make you happy, or you won't find true and lasting happiness. There are things in life which only you can change. Every day we're surrounded by circumstances over which we have little or no control, and to complain about them only makes us unhappier. So be your own best friend, and nurture your own capacity for happiness.

FAMILIES IN ENGLAND

Family life may be completely different in England, and relationships can become strained

'And that's the wonderful thing about family travel: it provides you with experiences that will remain locked forever in the scar tissue of your mind.'

Dave Barry (American writer & humorist)

under the stress of adapting to culture shock. Your family may find itself in a completely new and possibly alien environment, your new home may scarcely resemble your previous one (it may be significantly smaller, for example), and the climate may differ dramatically from that of your home country. If possible, you should prepare yourself for as many aspects of the new situation as you can, and explain to your children the differences they're likely to encounter, while at the same time dispelling their fears.



Culture shock can affect non-working spouses and children more than working spouses. The husband - it's usually the husband - has his work to occupy him, and his activities may not differ much from what he had been accustomed to at home. On the other hand, the wife has to operate in an environment that differs considerably from what she's used to. She will find herself alone more often – a solitude

intensified by the fact that there are no close relatives or friends on hand. However, if you're aware that this may arise beforehand, you can act on it and reduce its effects. Working spouses should pay special attention to the needs and feelings of their non-working partners and children, as the success of a family relocation depends on the ability of the wife and children to adapt to the new culture.

Good communication between family members is vital, and you should make time to discuss your experiences and feelings, both as a couple and as a family. Questions should always be raised and, if possible, answered, particularly when asked by children. However difficult the situation may appear at the beginning, it helps to bear in mind that it's by no means unique, and that most expatriate families experience exactly the same problems, and manage to triumph over them and thoroughly enjoy their stay abroad.



MULTICULTURALISM

The good news for newcomers to England is that it's a largely tolerant, multicultural society, where people from over 200 nationalities live, work and play in harmony (most of the time). This has not only greatly enriched the English way of life, and added to its cuisine, religions, businesses and ideas, but makes it much easier for immigrants to integrate into society. Virtually all ethnic groups in England maintain clubs and societies to which newcomers are warmly welcomed.

In England, migrants are encouraged to maintain their culture and ties with their homeland – rather than abandon them – while being urged to embrace English values.

Coined in Canada in the '70s, multiculturalism is the term used for an ideology advocating that immigrants integrate into society while retaining and valuing the most important elements of their own culture, including speaking their own language and teaching it to their children.

Consequently, England has one of the most ethnically diverse societies in the world and a relatively low level of inter-ethnic conflict, although flashpoints do occur from time to time.

A NEW LIFE

Although you may find some of the information in this chapter a bit daunting, don't be discouraged



by the foregoing catalogue of depression and despair; the negative aspects of travelling and living abroad have been highlighted only in order to help you prepare and adjust to a new life. The vast majority of people who travel and live abroad naturally experience occasional feelings of discomfort and disorientation, **but most never suffer the most debilitating effects of culture shock.**

As with settling in and making friends anywhere, even in your home country, the most important thing is to be considerate, kind, open, humble and genuine – qualities that are valued the world over. Selfishness, brashness and arrogance will get you nowhere in England – or any other country. Treat England and

its people with respect, and they will do likewise.

The majority of people living in England would agree that, all things considered, they love living there – and are in no hurry to return home. A period spent in England is a wonderful way to enrich your life, broaden your horizons, make new friends and maybe even please your bank manager.

‘Twenty years from now, you will be more disappointed by the things you didn’t do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowlines. Sail away from the safe harbour. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover.’

Mark Twain (American writer)



2.

WHO ARE THE ENGLISH?

Historically, England is one of the world's great nations, and although it's one of the smallest countries, it also ranks among the most attractive. England boasts fine cities with centuries of history; beautiful unspoilt countryside; a wealth of diverse regions to explore; a plethora of cultural, leisure and sports attractions to enjoy; and cutting-edge music, fashion and arts.

Some 30m visitors a year come to England as well as thousands of emigrants, including many English returning after a spell abroad; and although they don't come for the weather, England has a lot to offer if you don't mind a long-term relationship with your umbrella. You might be surprised to find it's one of the most multicultural nations in the world – London is officially the world's most multicultural city – and it's also a land of contradictions. England is a country with a big personality, that can laugh at itself and keep a stiff upper lip in adversity; a nation which ritually loses at most sports but follows them religiously anyway; and a land of pub-dwellers, DIY devotees and serial queuers, who would rather make a joke than a fuss.

If you're planning to come to England for any length of time, you can expect some certainties: crazy weather, a battering of your wallet from the high cost of living, and a first-class feast of scenery, history and culture, which means you'll almost certainly never be bored (even if it's raining!).

To help you get a sense of England and the English, this chapter contains information about English history, the English character and a list of English icons.

TIMELINE

Below is a brief look at the most important events in English history, from the Romans to the present day.

55BC-AD43 The Romans – Among England's many conquerors, the first were the Romans who arrived with Julius Caesar in 55BC. By AD43

they conquered the whole country, but resistance from the locals led to them building a wall from east to west, from Bowness-on-Solway, just west of Carlisle, to Wallsend on the River Tyne estuary.

The wall, large parts of which survive to this day, was named after the emperor Hadrian, and created

'The funniest thing of all is that even if you love England and belong to it, you still can't make head or tail of it.'

G.K. Chesterton
(English writer)