

'When overseas, you learn more about your own country than you do the place you are visiting.' Clint Borgen, American activist

OVERVIEW

LISTENING
Cultural differences

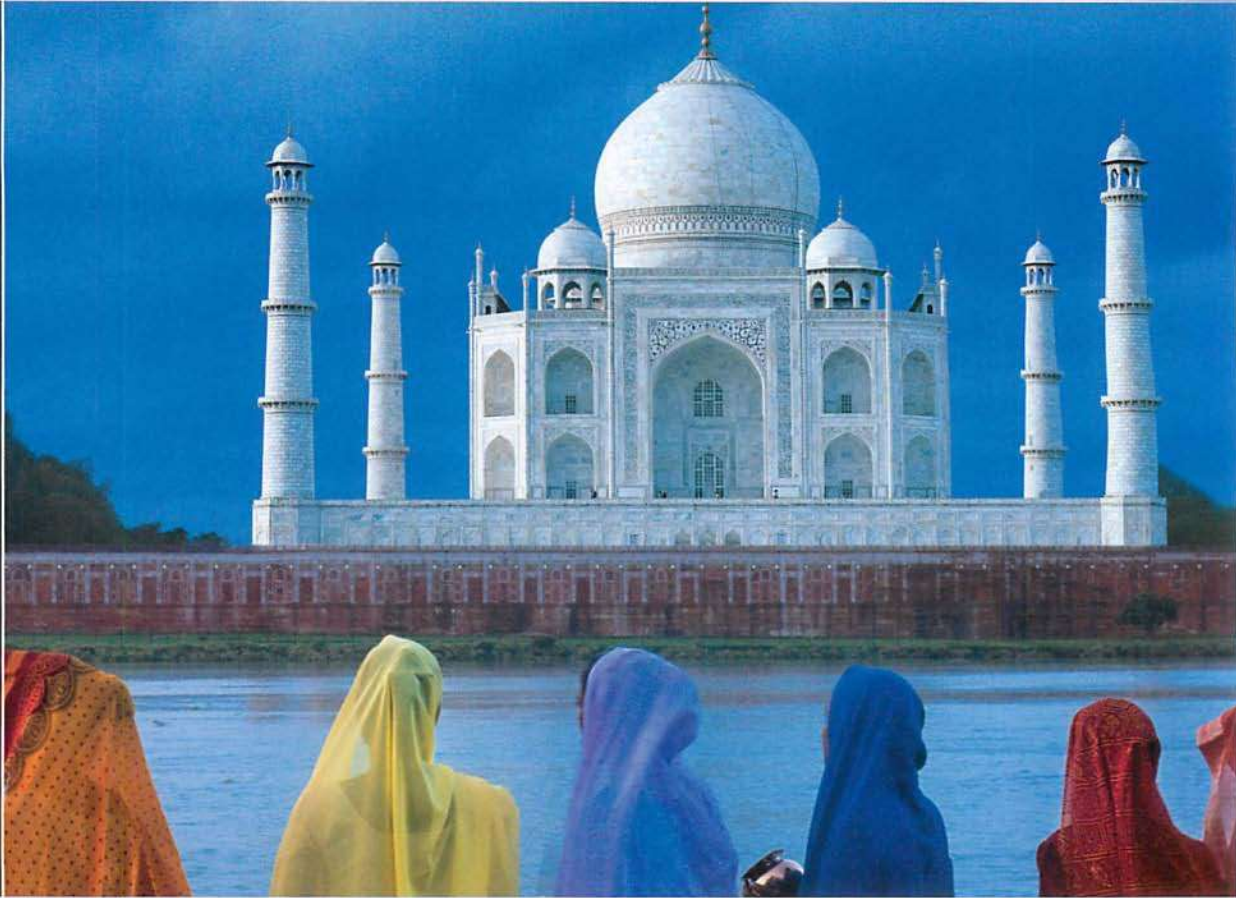
VOCABULARY
Idioms

READING
Culture shock

LANGUAGE REVIEW
Advice, obligation and necessity

SKILLS
Social English

CASE STUDY
Business culture briefing



STARTING UP

A What do you miss most about your own culture when you go abroad?

B Why is cultural awareness important for businesspeople? Give examples.

C What is culture? Choose the four factors that you think are the most important in creating a culture. Give your reasons.

climate	historical events	language
architecture	behaviour and attitudes	institutions
religion	social customs and traditions	cuisine
geography	ceremonies and festivals	arts

D Do you think cultures are becoming more alike? Is this a good thing or a bad thing? Give reasons for your answers. Think about:

- improved communications
- cheap foreign travel
- global business
- trading groups (such as the EU, ASEAN, USAN)

E How important are these things when doing business in your country? Are they a) important, b) not important or c) best avoided?

- exchanging business cards
- being formal or informal
- shaking hands
- punctuality
- bowing
- humour
- kissing
- eye contact



- socialising with contacts
- small talk before meetings
- accepting interruption
- giving presents
- being direct (saying exactly what you think)
- using first names

LISTENING
Cultural differences



Jeff Toms

Watch the interview on the DVD-ROM.



A CD1.44 Jeff Toms is Marketing Director at an international cultural training centre. Listen to the first part of the interview and answer the questions.

- 1 What two factors affect the 'Middle East clock'?
- 2 What can cause problems for Americans when they do business with Latin cultures?

B CD1.45 Listen to the second part of the interview and say what qualities companies should look for when sending staff abroad.

C CD1.46 Listen to the final part of the interview and complete the gaps.

I think also one of the key features of the successful¹ is to be non-.....². For instance, if you're coming from an Asian culture to try and do business with a Western culture, for certain the way that people do things will be fundamentally different – the³, the structure, the⁴, the seniority and the⁵ of the people you're doing business with – will be fundamentally different.

D If you could be sent anywhere in the world to work, which country would you choose? What aspects of its culture do you particularly like?

READING

Culture shock

A Read the article below quickly and decide which of the following (1–5) are:

- a) referred to in a positive way in the text
 b) referred to in a negative way in the text
 c) not referred to at all.

- 1 understanding the culture of the country you are living in
- 2 asking British colleagues personal questions when you meet them for the first time
- 3 hiring staff who are flexible and tolerant
- 4 providing staff with practical support
- 5 looking at the role of the spouse (husband or wife) in the selection of candidates for overseas postings.

B Read the article again and answer the questions.

- 1 What things are people from different countries in an organisation:
 - a) likely to have in common
 - b) likely not to have in common?
- 2 What is 'cultural awareness'?

C Work in pairs. What do you think should be covered in a cultural training course?

D Write a paragraph using information from the article and giving tips to people doing business in the UK.

Standard Bank overcomes culture shock

It is increasingly common for multinational businesses to send employees on international assignments, but without the right cross-cultural skills, staff will often struggle. Wayne Mullen, Head of Learning and Development at Standard Bank, discusses the impact that cultural challenges can have on employees relocating to another country. In order to be successfully transferred, employees must understand the host-country culture, he argues.

Colleagues from different countries might share similar professional knowledge and skills within a single international organisation, but their ways of working, social skills, body language and ways of doing business are likely to be completely different. They may have different patterns of behaviour which need to be understood and appreciated in order for everyone to work together successfully. For example, while it may be acceptable for Chinese office workers in Hong Kong to use the door-close button on a lift no matter how many people are also getting in, doing

such a thing in London would make people extremely angry. It is common for South Africans to ask personal questions of their counterparts shortly after being introduced, while a British colleague may perceive this as impolite and inappropriate. Latin Americans' need for personal space is much less than that of their British colleagues.

Global companies should never underestimate the effect that culture can have on international assignments. Cultural awareness is much more than simply knowing about a country's history and geography. It is about understanding how and why cultures work differently. It is also important to understand your own cultural make-up in order to work more effectively, maximise teamwork and strengthen global competence.

The Standard Bank group operates in 38 different countries, and its London office alone has 56 nationalities. This wide range of nationalities needs to communicate effectively in order to work as one

team. The bank recognised that in order to harmonise working practices within its culturally diverse office, it needed to provide foreign workers with a meaningful understanding of British business culture and communication styles. It also needed to offer practical support which allowed employees to cope with the challenges of living and working in an unfamiliar environment; their reactions to day-to-day issues such as the weather, public transport and social etiquette are often the most visible manifestations of culture shock.

Standard Bank has engaged Communicaid, a European culture and communication skills consultancy, to design a tailored training solution which introduces delegates to some of the key cultural differences that they are likely to face in the UK.

