

Got Culturosimy? Cultural Photographers Do

Culturosimy helps you experience and capture culture on film

by Kate Berardo

What makes a good CP (cultural photographer)?

Culturosimy—an ongoing interest in other cultures that leads to developing the skills needed to interact cross-culturally. Culturosimy helps photographers see beyond the surface culture and capture a deeper, richer culture on film. CPs go into other cultures with their camera and the following qualities:

- **Awareness**—CPs are aware of their own cultural influences and the cultures of others. They are highly perceptive of the similarities and differences found in other individuals and groups.
- **Curiosity**—CPs have a curiosity about themselves and others. This curiosity comes through in their photographs, allowing viewers of their work to appreciate interesting aspects of other cultures.
- **Flexibility/Openness**—Cultural photographers demonstrate an openness to new experiences as well as a flexibility to the unexpected changes that are typical of cross-cultural experiences. They enjoy partaking in different ways of thinking and behaving that exist in different cultures. When a unique opportunity for cultural exploration arises, a CP is there and up for the challenge, with camera in hand.
- **Global Mindset**—Even when zoomed in on intricate details with their cameras, CPs generally demonstrate a global mindset. They appreciate the interconnectedness of the world and see the links between different systems, groups, people, ideas, and global and local movements. They can therefore see the cultural complexity of a new environment and pick up on energies and opportunities for unique photography that others may miss.
- **Open Attitude**—CPs show an open attitude to other cultures. They often think outside of the box and challenge their assumptions and stereotypes about the cultures they are photographing. This allows them to develop a rich, well-rounded appreciation for cultures that shows through in their photography.
- **Ownership**—CPs take responsibility for their actions. They don't hide behind their cameras and they act appropriately when they do make cultural mistakes. They manage the sometimes difficult and often uncertain dynamics of cross-cultural situations with integrity and responsibility.
- **Respect**—CPs don't judge with their camera, they observe and respect other cultures with their photography. They view their subjects as guides for cultural understanding and hope to learn about them and from them through their photography. Photographers choose who and what they portray and how they do so. When CPs respect their subjects, so too, do the viewers of their photographs.



Four Key Skills of Advanced Cultural Photographers

Having the qualities mentioned above, CPs develop four highly important cross-cultural skills.

1 Switching Skills— CPs adapt their behavior to better meet the expectations of locals. Just like people wear a number of 'hats' (mother, manager, friend, spouse) in their daily lives and act according to the needs of each role, style-switching is about adjusting your behavior to fit the needs of different cultural contexts. A CP can be quiet and reserved at a religious ceremony, gregarious and outgoing at a festival. She can be direct and punctual in some settings and indirect and time flexible in others. He carries himself loosely and openly in some settings and is able to adapt his body language to a more formal and reserved style in others. Even when they don't speak much of the language, CPs can harmonize with the speech patterns and mannerisms of those around them, and in doing so, may seem to blend in with the local population more than those that don't.

2 Cultural Knowledge

Banks—CPs build an extensive cultural knowledge bank over time that is filled with tidbits of cultural insight. They call on their past experiences to guide them through future interactions and help them to build trust and strong relationships across cultures. Cultural knowledge banks include information gained not only through first hand experience such as traveling and

living abroad, but also from a host of second hand sources: conversations with locals, television, books, the Internet, movies, and music. Moreover, CPs generally create some kind of strategy for continually building these knowledge banks. They may actively seek out information from a variety of sources and are constantly integrating new information into their knowledge banks.

3 Emotional Resilience — Cultural photographers recognize the challenges of interacting across cultures, but their culturocity helps them

stay positive and motivated. They rebound from and react positively to the experiences they face, and understand that setbacks, confusion, and obstacles are often part of the learning process. Their flexibility and openness allows them to show more patience in difficult situations that are breaking points for others.



4 Cultural Decision Making— Armed with an extensive knowledge bank, emotional resilience, and style-switching skills, CPs accurately perceive various aspects of the cultures they are in. They apply their cultural knowledge and are able to make decisions quickly and accurately that are appropriate given the cultural context. In doing so, they demonstrate creative thinking, high levels of tolerance for uncertainty, and flexibility.

Cultural photographers are human. They've pulled out their camera at the wrong time, misinterpreted a situation, acted inappropriately, and committed cultural taboos. What distinguishes them from the average traveler and photographer is that they've learned from these experiences and use them both to build their cultural knowledge bank and help guide their subsequent actions.

Cultural photographers place the importance of building their intercultural skills up there with building their technical photography skills. They realize that taking good photos in different cultures has as much to do with how they connect with and interact with the local culture as it does with their technical skills. ✧

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For more tips on photo-taking across cultures, read the entire *Pop Culturocity Guide to Photography* at www.culturocity.com.

