

So many countries, so many ways to offend

■ **Reading this country-by-country look at European customs and culture could make the difference between a successful or disastrous journey abroad.**

BY RICHARD PACHTER
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European Business Customs & Manners: A Country-by-Country Guide to European Customs and Manners. Mary Murray Bosrock. Meadowbrook. 496 pages.

Boy, I sure could have used this book before I went to France.

Years ago, my wife and I honeymooned in Europe. First stop: Paris!

As we disembarked from the airport bus, my dear bride stepped onto the cobblestone street and promptly sprained her ankle. I brushed the tears from her face and promised we'd still tour the Louvre despite her injury (and we did, thanks to a squeaky wheel chair and a junior docent).

They were nice enough at the hotel when they arranged

for a doctor to examine, then wrap her ankle, but my imperfect high school French was first ignored, then ridiculed by the burly countermen at the nearby deli when I tried to purchase several pre-euro francs worth of *jambon* (ham) an hour later.

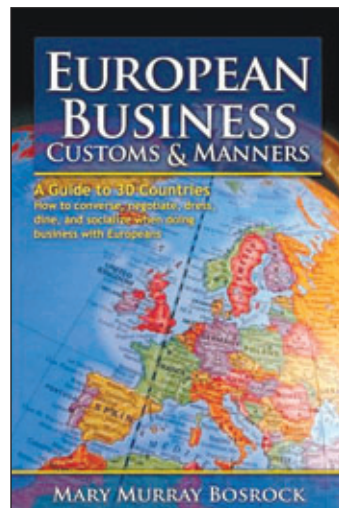
Throughout our brief Parisian sojourn, we alternated between warm, endearing people and sullen, hostile miscreants. (The atmosphere improved appreciably in Holland and England, but that's another review.)

In her new book, Mary Bosrock looks at each European nation from the perspective of the business traveler, but in truth, any traveling American would benefit greatly from the insights therein.

HAD I ONLY KNOWN...

For example, on page 168, I would have learned that "Unless your French is perfect, use it only for greetings, toasts and occasional phrases."

Oh.
And this nugget: "Shortly



after national hero Charles de Gaulle's death, Noel Coward was asked what he thought God and de Gaulle would talk about. Coward replied, "That depends on how good God's French is."

Right.
Each chapter, devoted to a specific country, starts with a letter written from the perspective of a native, addressed to a potential American business traveler. Bosrock does a

wonderful job of role-playing, imbuing each missive with the flavor and personality of that nation.

Not to pick on the French, but her "letter" nicely captures their haughty Gallic-centric cultural outlook and strict rules dictating personal behavior and most every human interaction. The impatience and self-importance they often exhibit toward Americans is also well conveyed.

In addition to her pretend note, Bosrock provides statistics on each country and its people, and a bullet-point list, called "Meeting and Greeting," specifying assorted social idiosyncrasies peculiar to each place, such as when handshakes — or kisses — are expected and then, which hand is considered polite or rude, depending on activity, gender and sundry factors.

COVERING IT ALL

Titles and other formal appellations are covered under another heading, as is language and conversation,

including acceptable and unacceptable subjects of discussion. Body language, dining, drinking, dress, gifts, holidays, social customs and more are also itemized and examined, with the length of the subjects changing according to each country's variations.

There's also a smart "Especially for Women" section in each chapter, a wise addition no doubt borne of the author's own observations and experiences with each country's cultural biases and practices determined by her gender.

Regardless of gender, for executives and vacationers, Mary Bosrock's wise and entertaining book is an excellent first stop along the journey.

To receive business book reviews by e-mail or join the Business Monday Book Club, e-mail Richard Pachter at rap@WordsOnWords.com. For more business book columns by Pachter, go to MiamiHerald.com and click on Columnists or visit www.WordsOnWords.com.

Author shares tips for successful travel in Europe

■ **Minnesota-based author Mary Murray Bosrock recently corresponded with Business Books columnist Richard Pachter.**

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Here in South Florida, we often look south toward Latin America and the Caribbean for business travel, but there's still a lot of commerce occurring between the United States and Europe.

Sharing her insights on social mores on the other side of the Atlantic, Minnesota/Miami-based author Mary Murray Bosrock recently corresponded by e-mail with Business Books columnist Richard Pachter.

Q: What is the single most important thing that business travelers should know before they visit Europe?

A: The most common negative comment made about Americans is that we know nothing about the rest of the world and don't seem to have any interest in learning. We



COURTESY OF MARY MURRAY BOSROCK

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE: Former international editor of Foreign Trade magazine, author Mary Murray Bosrock has traveled and worked in the international marketplace for more than 20 years.

are viewed as having the attitude that we know the best way to do everything and the rest of the world should just do it our way in order to succeed: the classic Ugly American.

Q: What might someone

who hasn't ever been to Europe for business or pleasure encounter that would surprise them?

A: Appearances count! Europeans are more formal. They still use titles and seldom use first names until a long and personal relationship is established. Their body language, posture and presentation are more reserved than Americans'. They appreciate and expect correct posture, good manners and proper respect. Sloppy dress and body language are viewed very negatively. You will still be greeted and welcomed into shops and restaurants depending upon how you present yourself. Arriving in sneakers and a sweat shirt may cause you not to get served — especially in the better places.

Q: Has the current political situation affected the way Europeans treat Americans?

A: After Sept. 11, the whole world loved us, especially those who lived behind the former "Iron Curtain." We were viewed not just as a

place, but as a universal dream: the land of the free and the home of the brave.

"America" is no longer the greatest brand name ever created. While in the past, there were people who felt Americans were arrogant and loud and full of themselves, there was still a level of admiration. We were viewed as leaders in areas of human rights, a can-do country that was able to build a powerful economy and military but still value the individual. We are no longer viewed this way. Iraq, Katrina, the treatment of our prisoners, wiretapping and secret prisons have changed our image worldwide.

Q: Is there any one thing travelers should do to prepare for a trip to a country they haven't previously visited?

A: Knowing what people expect and a little about their history and present-day issues shows respect. I am still surprised at the level of acceptance I get when I use a few polite phrases, make a toast in the local language or ask

informed questions. People are always amazed and appreciative — especially when you are an American.

Q: Other than the obvious (murder, drugs, robbery, assault, etc.) are there any things that could get American travelers in trouble in Europe?

A: Car and bicycle theft, and purse snatching are major problems in most big cities. Traffic is out of control in many cities. Depending upon whom you talk to, drivers in Portugal, Spain, Italy or Greece are the worst in the world. High speeds and disregard for road rules make driving hazardous. Take trains or use mass transit, which are generally good, clean and safe.

Q: Are there any countries where one's money goes farther, even with the current weak dollar?

A: The idea of the EU and euro was to put things on the same price level, and they sure have done it. Everything seems very expensive everywhere.

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