



Travel Karma: Be A Good Traveler

I've always loved adventuring, and always felt privileged to be able to travel, especially in foreign cultures. I'm so appreciative that I try to tread lightly; I'd rather blend in and get an insider's perspective of where I am, rather than announcing my presence in a brash way. More often than not, I'm rewarded with a special invitation, some little nugget of knowledge, or some tidbit of insider information that only can be had by gently being in touch with the locals.

A couple years ago, I was with a friend, riding in southern Spain in wet and sloppy conditions for several days. We'd had a hard travel schedule, I was hungry, and it was easy to be irritable as we circled the town several times looking for a dry place to get off the bikes. We stopped at a couple of places, only to be told it was siesta and to come back later. My companion finally found a place that was open, a diner with a tacky yellow awning, and I was not impressed. I mean, I was in Andalucia, after all; it's supposed to be exotic. (Yes, I've learned that hunger or physical discomfort often lead to ill-tempered thinking.)

Luckily, I contained my grumpiness. The chef himself delivered a delicious platter of braised rabbit with a medley of vegetables, potatoes, and roasted chest-

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nuts in a yummy sauce, and I relaxed into a delightful culinary experience. As we savored the midday meal, the restaurant filled; we were greeted by locals and chatted with the wait staff. The day seemed brighter.

Because I'd held my temper, we were treated to the extraordinary.

After we'd finished eating, the waiter brought out the customary bottle of *hierbas*, followed by a bottle of *pacharan*. Since we still had many miles to travel, I could only sample it; however, when I inquired about purchasing some of the tasty liquor I was told that it was made "only for the very good customers" by the restaurateur and not for sale. Finished with the meal, and with a timely break in the rain, we complimented the chef and said our goodbyes to the other patrons. Outside, the restaurant owner himself came up to me and tucked a bottle of *pacharan* under my arm, telling me that I should bring a taste of his country back to the United States with me.

Once again, I was reminded a little travel karma goes a long way. Having good manners and a sunny disposition gets me much further than being annoying

and irascible. Even when tempted by bad weather, trying circumstances, or even just low blood sugar, I've found my experience ultimately benefits from following certain guidelines.

First and foremost, smile! There are so many different languages, customs, and values in the world, and one of the most beneficial things you can do when traveling is to simply smile. It seems to me that just about everywhere I've been a smile breaks through barriers, diffuses difficult situations, perhaps even issues an invitation to conversation. At the very least it shows that you are not a threat.

Next, ask questions. The less you talk, the more you hear, and you just may encounter that nugget that gives a whole new meaning to your travels.

I always ask people permission before taking their picture. As Americans, we're so inured to cameras we even have them on our telephones. Yet there are places in the world where people believe taking a photograph of them harms them, perhaps even steals their soul. Or maybe they just prefer to remain private. Respect their wishes. (By the way, want to meet people? Ask them to take a picture of you. It's a great opener!)

Tread lightly (leave no trace). Do the tourist thing, but don't leave anything behind like trash,

carved initials, or a burning fire. I try to leave a place looking as good as or better than when I arrived — sometimes by picking up other people's trash.

Be humble. Learn a little of the local language (Even while traveling in your own country, take time to learn a little bit about local culture, even if gleaned from the newspaper that morning!) Remember that you are a curiosity to non-motorcyclists. People who ride are still a small minority of the population at large. Let folks approach you, and do your best to answer their questions. Chances are they'll share something with you that you would never receive otherwise or at least give you a good story to tell when you arrive back home.

Be an ambassador for motorcycling. Wear all the appropriate gear and ride responsibly. Use your turn signals. Keep a safe distance between your motorbike and other vehicles. Offer a thank-you wave when someone lets you pass. Who knows? You just might be a catalyst for a new train of thought. At the very least you'll have others envying your freedom and sense of adventure.

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