



# The WORLD Around Us

*Bridges to Connect with and  
Engage Ethnic Groups*

**Equip people to reach their international neighbors  
from 12 different cultures.**

# The World Around Us

Bridges to Connect with

and Engage Ethnic Groups

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# How to Use

## **What Is The World Around Us: Bridges to Connect with and Engage Ethnic Groups?**

This resource focuses on 12 different people groups prominent in the United States. Use these articles to discover specific, creative ways to connect with and reach out to people of other ethnicities. Engage these people, build relationships with them, and, at the right time, share your faith with them.

### **Who Is It For?**

This resource is helpful for

- anyone with neighbors of other ethnic groups;
- all who eat out, especially in ethnic restaurants;
- employees in the workforce;
- international travelers;
- missions trip volunteers;
- residents of a university town;
- teachers, especially English as a second language teachers;
- families who host international students.

Offer this resource to any individual or group who wants to positively engage different cultures rather than avoid them.

### **Why Understand Other Cultures?**

It is not a matter of whether other cultures are around us; they are. Knowing as much as we can about other cultures enables us to discover connecting points, avoid embarrassing pitfalls, and genuinely build relationships with them. We witness by our actions as we show love, compassion, and respect for them. At the right time, we will witness with our words and tell them about Jesus.

### **What Is Included in Each Article?**

1. Sociological article with basic people group information
2. Conversation starters
3. Connection points
4. Cultural taboos to consider
5. Lessons learned from them
6. Ways to go further in relationship building

# Vietnamese Americans

VIETNAMESE AMERICANS, like most other Asian groups, have the largest representation in California, but

the state with the second-highest population is Texas because of the large Vietnamese communities in Houston and Dallas/Ft. Worth. San Jose and Los Angeles also boast a large representation along with the cities in Texas. Though the Vietnamese are the fourth-largest Asian group in the country, they are the main Asian minority in a select few states in the South and Midwest such as Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Kansas, and Nebraska. The Vietnamese population in the early 1980s was less than 300,000 and today it exceeds 1.6 million.

Vietnam is a country that was once divided based on democratic and communist ideals. The north and south are still very different cultures today, even though they are united under a communist state. The south especially values entrepreneurship and the north values nationalism and pride in the country. Most Vietnamese Americans are from the southern region and came over as refugees of the war. Many often wave the old South Vietnamese flag instead of the modern one at festivals and parades.

The Vietnamese have a great respect for the elderly as many Asian cultures do. The extended family as well as the immediate is extremely important for the Vietnamese, especially when a new family is formed. A marriage is a union between two families and is a very important ceremony. Their language is also



Cindy Huymh listens to her daughter during a youth group Bible study at a Vietnamese Baptist church in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

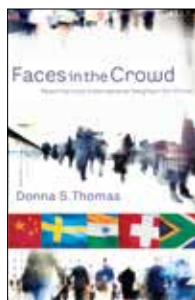
incredibly important to their culture, but a small portion of Vietnamese speak Cantonese, too.

Vietnamese Americans are extremely polite and try to avoid offending someone at any cost. They try to avoid direct eye contact most of time and prevent open disagreement with others when they get the chance. However, young Vietnamese born in the United States are seen as brash and often time “disrespectful” by the older generations because of their lack of traditional manners.

Buddhism is the religion of the overwhelming majority of people in Vietnam, but about 30 percent of Vietnamese Americans are Catholic. Vietnamese Catholicism falls in line with the general principles of mainstream Catholics, but it is also heavily influenced by Confucianism and its beliefs in justice and treatment of others. Cao Dai is a religion claimed by many and is considered a fusion of aspects of Roman Catholicism and many traditional Asian religions. There is a very small amount that claim Protestantism.

Vietnamese Americans are easy to get to know. They appreciate intentional people who concentrate on relationships. Vietnamese cuisine is famous internationally, and for many, eating dinner is a great way to get to know someone better.

Sources: census.gov, everyculture.com, ediplomat.com, adoptvietnam.org



**Faces in the Crowd: Reaching Your International Neighbor for Christ,** by Donna S. Thomas  
N084131 • \$12.99

**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis, Tennessee, who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.

# Connections

By Brittany Conner

## With Vietnamese Americans

### SPORTS

#### Soccer

KARATE judo  
SWIMMING  
chess

### Conversation Starters

- Families are highly valued within Vietnamese American culture, so start off by asking about family and sharing about your own.
- Invite your Vietnamese American friend to your home for a family meal and game night.
- When greeting or saying goodbye, shake hands with both hands and slightly bow your head. Women typically do not shake hands but merely bow, as do the elderly.
- Try learning to say *xin chao* (pronounced "seen chow") for meeting someone. The phrase means hello and will go a long way in impressing your Vietnamese friend.

### Culture 101

- Join your Vietnamese American friend at your city's Vietnamese Mid-Autumn Festival (if there is one).
- If there is no local festival, invite your friend to your home to make traditional lanterns and moon cakes. A recipe can be found at [theravenouscouple.com/recipes](http://theravenouscouple.com/recipes).
- Only parents and grandparents touch children on the head.
- Men and women do not publicly show affection to the opposite sex.
- It is acceptable for women to hold hands with each other.

**BRITTANY CONNER** lives in Jacksonville, Florida, where her time is spent between writing and chasing her four children, including toddling triplets.

## Going Further

**1** Most Vietnamese are Buddhists, and those who are Christians often revere Mary, the mother of Jesus. Ask your friend about her beliefs, and ask if you can share about yours.



**2** Invite your Vietnamese American friend over for dinner, consisting of a salad filled with slivered vegetables like carrots and cabbage.

Serve salad at room temperature with a dressing made of lime juice, garlic, chili powder, and sugar.

**3** Arrange a dinner party and ask your Vietnamese American friend over to show you and friends how to make food packets for dinner. These are meat and vegetables that are wrapped in a lettuce leaf or rice paper and dipped in sauce.

**4** Arrange a soccer game between friends and invite your Vietnamese American friends.



**1.** Dignity is of great importance. Avoid sarcasm or criticism that could offend your friend. Also, do not openly disagree or confront your friend.

**2.** Vietnamese Americans tend to dress conservatively. Be sure to dress modestly and avoid short shorts or dresses and sleeveless shirts.

**3.** Try to avoid drawing attention to yourself with loud or garish behavior.

**4.** Graciously accept any gift your friend offers, even if it is to pay for a meal. To refuse or argue can cause your friend to lose face.

## Building Bridges

Rosemarie glanced around the nail salon and noticed photographs of a young boy. She asked her nail technician, John, if the boy was his son. John said yes, and he began to tell her about his family. Rosemarie then shared about her grandchildren and family, including the fact that her husband had recently died. "We just talked about family and soccer," Rosemarie says. A few months later, John shared that he was moving and needed furniture. "My mother had just died and I had all her extra furniture so I offered it to him," she says.

From that point on, John jokingly called himself Rosemarie's other son. Rosemarie has known John now for seven years, and they have talked about everything from sports to family happenings.



### Open Your Eyes

Do you have a university nearby? If so, you have internationals in your city. Contact the university and ask to speak to the international student director.



# Samoaan Americans

SAMOAN AMERICANS are the second-largest Pacific Islander group in America after native Hawaiian.

Samoa is an island system consisting of six islands in American Samoa and nine islands in Samoa. This makes this people a significant and large group in the United States. The majority of Samoaan Americans reside in California and Hawaii with another large representation in Washington. Some cities with large numbers of Samoaan Americans include Los Angeles, San Francisco, Honolulu, Seattle, and Salt Lake City. The population of expatriates living in mainland US well outnumbers the population of American Samoa.

Samoa is a large group of islands considered to be a principal part of the Polynesian islands. The population of American Samoa is around 55,000, while the population of Samoa is more than 195,000. American Samoa is a territory of the US where most Samoaan Americans hail from, although some Samoaan Americans also come from Upolu in Samoa.

Samoaan culture, especially religion, is heavily influenced by American intervention in the area. It is principally Protestant due to missionary efforts throughout the region, and there are some pockets of Mormon and Roman Catholic religions. Many Samoans came to America and settled in Salt Lake City because of their membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Samoans celebrate many national holidays as well as traditional holidays. In addition to this, the celebration of “White Sunday” is common in many denominations. This is the second Sunday in October, and it revolves around children reciting memorized selections. The children are then given a feast and presents after their performances.

Samoaan culture is considered to be kind and hospitable to foreigners especially. Any



SHUTTERSTOCK/PAOLO BONA

formality is suspended for an outsider. Being aware of their manners is never a bad idea though. Upon entering a Samoaan household, one might want to check and see if anyone is wearing shoes. It is often considered disrespectful to wear shoes in a home. In more traditional households, one should bow low upon walking in front of someone and say *tulou* (too-low), which means “excuse me.”

Intentionality is important upon first meeting a Samoaan American, so make sure to shake everyone’s hand in a group. One of the greatest traditional honors a guest can be paid is the serving of kava. If a friend bequeaths this drink unto you, you are supposed to allow a couple drops to fall to the floor indicating a returning of goodness to the earth. Make sure about this tradition before you go and spill anything on a new friend’s new carpet, though. Also be aware that negative emotions including anger, irritation, or hostility are considered to be in bad taste for Samoaan Americans. Politeness is the standard for Samoaan behavior even under tense circumstances.

Inviting a new friend over to eat is considered to be very kind. Be sure to treat the food with respect, as this is a rule of etiquette in Samoa, and never eat in front of someone without offering to share. If you are offered a gift or hospitality, do not refuse it. This shows displeasure or ungratefulness. In the end, a friendly attitude and willingness to understand Samoaan culture are the most important factors to many Samoaan Americans.

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**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis, Tennessee, who loves good movies, good cheese-cake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.

Sources: britannica.com, census.gov, cia.gov, culturecrossing.net, everyculture.com

# Connections

By Shirley Cox

## With Samoan Americans

### SPORTS

Rugby  
Soccer  
Wrestling



### Conversation Starters

- Invite Samoans to a pig roast, meal, or cookout. Present small gifts to your guests.
- Welcome Samoan neighbors with gifts of food or handmade crafts.
- Engage Samoan men in talking about sports. Ask them to watch or participate in sporting events.
- Talk to Samoan women about crafts. Invite them to a crafts class or to do crafting with you. Get to know them in a relaxed setting.

### Culture 101

- Gift giving is important.
- Respect elders.
- Accept whatever hospitality is offered.

## Going Further

**1** The three main parts of the Samoan culture are faith, family, and music. Yet, differences between American and Samoan culture may seem challenging. After all, Samoan natives live in a warm climate in an island setting where traditional living quarters or *fale* houses contain no walls. (Up to 20 people may sleep on the ground in the same *fale*.) During the day, the *fale* is used for chatting and relaxing. Invite Samoan friends to your home for dessert and a visit.

**2** Samoans also enjoy restful Sundays when many families congregate to share an *umu* (an oven of hot rocks above ground) to cook a whole pig, fresh seaweed, crayfish, baked taro, and rice. Ask your friend to go to church with you and join your family for lunch. Answer any questions your Samoan American friend has about the worship he just attended.



SHUTTERSTOCK/CHAMELEONSEYE

*Earth oven, or umu, at the early stage of heating the rocks underground*

**3** Just as we celebrate significant events such as birthdays, weddings, graduations, and other events with food and gifts, the most prominent feature of the Samoan culture is *Fa'aaloaloga*, the formal presentation of gifts at special occasions. The most common gifts are food or mats. Gifts are given without expectation of reciprocation and frequently indicate the status or prestige of the giver and the receiver. Invite your Samoan friend to your birthday party and use it as an opportunity to talk about your faith.

**4** Samoan women might enjoy making crafts such as toga (finely woven mats used in ceremony and gift exchanges) or ornaments, jewelry, and hair accessories from natural materials such as seashells and coconuts. Arrange a craft day with women from your church and invite your Samoan American friend to share one of her crafts from natural materials with your group. Share a Christian witness.

**5** Sports like rugby, soccer, and wrestling are popular among Samoan men. Invite a Samoan friend to events where Christian athletes are speaking.

### Open Your Eyes

Pay attention to the waiters at ethnic restaurants you visit. Engage them in conversation. Find out where they are from.

### What I've Learned from Them

The Samoan people are friendly and welcome visitors from the United States. Samoan children are encouraged to sing in church and in school. Students are bilingual, speaking English and Samoan. Classes are taught in English but church services are conducted in both languages.

SHIRLEY COX writes from Mt. Vernon, Kentucky.



1. It is usually considered rude to stand when others are sitting.
2. Remove shoes before entering a Samoan home.
3. If seated on the floor, a visitor should not point the bottoms of his feet at someone but sit cross-legged or with a mat covering his legs.
4. No gift offered by a Samoan should be refused.
5. When served food by others, it is important to show respect to the food.
6. Display of negative emotions, particularly irritation, anger, or hostility is considered bad taste and a sign of weakness.

# Asian Indian Americans

ASIAN INDIANS ARE THE second-largest Asian group within the United States after Chinese and before

Filipino. Their location within the United States is most heavily concentrated in California and New York, and the cities with the most significant populations are New York City, Chicago, and San Jose. However, only 24 percent of Asian Indian Americans live in the West as opposed to 47 percent of all Asian Americans, making them more dispersed. The Asian Indian population is the most populous Asian group in the middle to southeastern states, including Texas, Florida, Illinois, Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, Ohio, and Michigan.

India itself is second in population to China. It makes up nearly one fifth of the world's population. It has an overall official language of Hindi, but 14 other official languages are spoken throughout different parts of the country, including Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, and Sanskrit. About 80 percent of Asian Indians are Hindu and more than 13 percent are Muslim, with small groupings of Christians, Sikhs, and Buddhists throughout the country.

It's nearly impossible to sum up Asian Indian culture in a short article because so many different people groups and societies exist within India itself. However, some commonalities are generally shared by Asian Indian Americans. The Asian Indian American culture is one that has a high value on family and the collective. They are very involved



with their communities and are more than happy to share their culture by inviting a new friend over for a meal of Indian food. Some Asian Indian Americans may enjoy speaking to an eloquent speaker who is also respectful. This may lead to deep conversation that will further a relationship. The culture also still holds characteristics from British influence such as tea, cricket, parliamentary rule, titles of nobility, English language, and respect for English literature.

According to Pew Research Center's social and demographic trends, Asian Indian Americans statistically well achieve success and education. Seventy-three percent of Asian Indian Americans speak English very well. This is higher than the average for all Asian American groups, which is 53 percent. Thirty-two percent of Asian Indian Americans 25 and older have a bachelor's degree as compared to 18 percent of the American population overall. The median household income for Asian Indian Americans is \$88,000 per year as opposed to \$66,000 for all Asians and \$49,800 of the entire US population. Seventy-one percent of Asian Indian Americans are married in contrast to 51 percent of Americans. Tracking with this, when Asian Indian Americans are asked to identify one of the most important things in life, 64 percent said "having a successful marriage" and 78 percent said "being a good parent." These statistics reflect that this group values hard work, success, and family.

Showing intentionality and honesty is the best way to develop a relationship with an Asian Indian American. This group places a high value on intentionality and interest. Show this to them, and you should have no problem developing friendships.

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**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis, Tennessee, who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.



# Connections

By Phyllis Godwin

## Asian Indian Americans

### SPORTS

cricket  
chess  
soccer  
hockey

tennis  
golf



### Conversation Starters

- Sharing a meal is a good way to develop friendships. Many Asian Indians like curry, chicken, lamb, and fish. They do not eat beef for religious reasons. Some may enjoy *Tandoori* chicken cooked in a special oven, *dosa* (Indian pancake), and *poori*, or “puffy bread” (deep-fried balloon bread).

- Families might enjoy the carrom game, badminton, and other sports and card games.

- To greet a new neighbor, take a gift of cookies or some other dessert or fruit.

### Culture 101

- When greeting an Asian Indian, place your palms together in front of you and bow your head slightly. Shaking hands is OK.

- Hindu Asian Indians regularly attend temple services if a temple is nearby. If a temple is not nearby, then they often travel to another city for special holidays and festivals. Most will have a prayer altar in their homes. Women usually wear saris to temple services and festivals.

- Family relationships are important. Divorce rates are very low. In many Asian Indian American families, both the husband and wife work outside the home. Many intergenerational families and family members are dependent on one another.
- Education is considered highly important.

Sources: everyculture.com, culturecrossing.net, pewsocialtrends.org

## Going Further

1 Invite an Asian Indian friend to give you a cooking lesson on an Indian dish. Teach your friend how to prepare an American dish.

2 Attend a Holi festival or Festival of Colors in your area. The festival is an opportunity for new friendships, fun, and Asian Indian culture. →

3 Invite a new friend or neighbor to lunch or coffee, to go shopping, or to take a class together—Tai Chi perhaps.



1. Refrain from casual touching between men and women.

2.

Don't bring up politics or religion unless you are good friends.

3.

Don't offer beef for a meal. It is also good to inquire if a person is a vegetarian or not.



### Open Your Eyes

Do you have an international industrial plant (e.g., automobile, steel, etc.) in your area? Are internationals working there? Where do they live?

### Getting to Know Them

Gita\* settled into her chair across from me at the snack area of our church gym. Earlier I asked her if she would be willing to answer some questions about Asian Indian Americans. She said, “Sure.” I knew Gita from our Tai Chi class, which met at the gym. We had been in class together for more than two years. I knew her name and greeted her each time, but I knew absolutely nothing about her. I spent the first part of the time together just getting to know her better. I found out she had been in the United States for 45 years. I learned about her children and that she worked part-time in her husband's office. She learned some things about me. After I completed the interview questions for this article, we parted. As we were leaving the gym, Gita reminded me that she was the one who told me about the Tai Chi class and invited me to come.

\*Name changed.



### What I Have Learned from Them

- Many Asian Indians are offended by the casual sex and nudity found abundantly in America.

- It is easy to establish a friendship. Just be interested in the person. Learn about families, hobbies, and other interests.

- India is a diverse culture with different languages, foods, and customs.

PHYLLIS GODWIN hopes to inspire women to broaden their focus in local missions.

# Israeli Americans

THE ISRAELI POPULATION in the United States is small but growing. Fifty percent of Israeli Americans live in New York City

and Los Angeles. New York, California, and Florida hold the largest populations of the states. Other major cities with the most Israeli Americans are Miami, Chicago, and Detroit.

Israelis increasingly began immigrating to the US after Israel's independence in 1948. The significant waves of immigration then were in full steam in the 1970s and continued from then on.

The primary language in Israel is Hebrew, and other languages include Arabic, English, Yiddish, and Ladino. These are language traditions that still exist among Israeli Americans today.

Many Israelis are accustomed to closer-knit communities and shared ideologies in Israel. So new settlers naturally form tight immigrant communities in New York and Los Angeles and other areas with large Israeli populations.

The religious breakdown of Israel is about 85 percent Judaism, 13 percent Muslim, and 2 percent Christian. The religious breakdown of Israeli Americans reflects their background. Israel itself is a melting pot of different colors and ethnicities. This was especially true after the Zionist movement, which was an initiative to move Jewish people back to a home country in Israel. Many supporters of the movement tend to criticize

young Israeli immigrants in America, as their departure from Israel is hurting the cause.

Israeli culture and traditions are largely centered around Judaism. The cuisine is concentrated on the rules of kosher, and the holidays are all mostly holidays of traditional Jewish culture, like Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Passover, and Hanukkah. These holidays are seasonal but do not fall on the same day every year, as they are based on the Hebrew Lunar calendar. Rosh Hashanah is

the Jewish New Year. Yom Kippur is the holiest day in the Jewish calendar and occurs ten days after the New Year begins. Fasting and prayer are customary the night before Yom Kippur. Passover takes place in the spring and celebrates that God passed over the Jews in Egypt when He delivered the ten plagues.

Hanukkah, or the festival of lights, is possibly the most well known Jewish holiday and celebrates the story of the Maccabees. The keeping of the Sabbath day on Saturday is also a huge part of the culture. Since Jewish holidays in Israel are considered national holidays, some Israeli Americans might express disappointment in or have trouble adjusting to the way these holidays are celebrated in the United States.

Some aspects of the culture are more loosely based on the Jewish faith, like the superstition around a baby's birth. A baby shower is traditionally held after the birth of

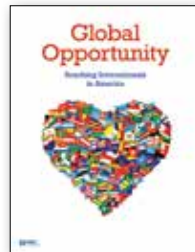


*Borough Park in Brooklyn is home to one of the largest Orthodox Jewish communities outside of Israel.*

the child. The naming ceremony is when the name is revealed for the first time, and a red ribbon is tied around the infant's crib. All these customs are in place to ward off evil forces that come along with the good fortune of a child's birth.

Israeli Americans value courage, morality, social justice, and opinionated viewpoints. Religiously, the Jewish community has faced a vast sea of prejudice and hatred over the years. Israeli culture still bears the scar of this hatred and, as such, values equality and human rights more than most other groups. Another contemporary issue that is relevant is the conflict with Palestine for land. Keep this in mind if you are getting to know an Israeli American. Invite them over for dinner, but make sure you respect their dietary regulations. Pork, shellfish, and dairy mixed with meats are some of the common mistakes one could make when inviting an Israeli American to dinner.

**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.



**For more information, visit [wmustore.com](http://wmustore.com) or call 1-800-968-7301.**

# Connections

By Gail Veale

## With Israeli Americans

soccer,  
basketball,  
swimming,  
tennis, chess



### Conversation Starters

- I find the Old Testament so fascinating. My favorite story is \_\_\_\_\_. What is yours?
- With Christmas coming soon, what Jewish holiday will you be celebrating? What is involved?
- Have you ever visited Israel? Our pastor (or someone you know) went last year and loved it. (Share what that person enjoyed about his trip.)

### Culture 101

- Orthodox Judaism reflects traditional Judaism. In North America, 17 percent of Jews are orthodox.
- Conservative Judaism "conserves," as much as possible, traditional Judaism but makes allowances for modern culture. This denomination represents the beliefs of about 33 percent of the Jewish population in North America.
- Reform Judaism embraces modernity, liberalism, and humanism to emphasize its relevance. About 22 percent of North American Jews fall into this category.
- According to 4truth.net, 28 percent of the North American Jewish population is unaffiliated with a particular denomination.
- Judaism emphasizes behavior, not doctrine.
- In the Jewish faith, kosher foods are based on Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:3-20. See [jewfaq.org/kashrut](http://jewfaq.org/kashrut) for a complete list and guidelines.

Sources: 4truth.net, jewfaq.org, jewsforjesus.org

**GAIL VEALE** writes in New Hill, North Carolina.

## Going Further

- 1 Pray for them. Show a genuine interest in their lives and build relationships.
- 2 Invite them to share a meal at your home and go into theirs when invited.
- 3 Be present at their child's Bar Mitzvah or Bat Mitzvah if invited.
- 4 Attend a holiday celebration with them, studying the Hebrew



Scripture (Old Testament) verses that relate. Talk about Scripture. So many Old Testament verses point to the Messiah.

- 5 Share your personal testimony and talk about how God has answered your prayers.
- 6 Tell them God loves them so much He sent the Messiah to provide atonement for their sin and ours.
- 7 Share that having faith in the Messiah doesn't mean giving up their identity as Jews but finding atonement for sin and discovering a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- 8 Show them that God loves them unconditionally, whether Jews or Gentiles.



1. Don't leave impressions of arrogance, superiority, or a disregard of culture. Witness with humility, prayer, and compassion.

2. Don't assume they will attend a Christian church when invited; they may not.

### Collision Course

The first year we lived in our home I sent Christmas cards to our neighbors. I knew one of them was Jewish but in the busyness of the season I forgot and mailed her one also. She came over later that week and said, "Happy holidays!" in response to my "Merry Christmas."



It all became clear and I shared my forgetfulness and lack of understanding. She said it was fine. We went on to become very good friends, with her coming to our children's weddings and our attending their child's Bat Mitzvah.



Look around your local coffee shop. Internationals might be there. Talk to them, and ask them to tell you about their country.



# Somali Americans

SOMALI AMERICANS ARE SOME of the newest members to the United States. In their brief prevalence here,

their state of highest concentration has been Minnesota. Cities with significant populations include Minneapolis–St. Paul and Washington, D.C.

The largest amount of Somali immigration occurred around 1991 as a result of civil war. This diaspora has brought about a large community in the US today. Somalia itself is a coastal country on the Horn of Africa that is a neighbor to Ethiopia. Somali Americans are principally Sunni Muslim in accordance with their homeland's national religion. The first language in Somalia is Somali, followed by Arabic and English. A small amount of Italian speakers remain from when the Horn of Africa was occupied by Italy during the Second World War.

Somali culture is highly influenced by proximity to other African countries as well as the very close Arabian Peninsula. This means the traditional dress is often times a combination of African adornment with Middle Eastern robes.

The structure of families is defined highly by what clan or sub-clan one belongs to. This is basically inclusion in a highly extended family, but many of the clans grow so large they are well known and revered in certain areas or even on a country-wide level. The Somali American community is not as



*Somalis are a new group of immigrants to America. In what ways can you reach out to them?*

clan based, but since many immigrants are so new, some may retain clan connections in the US and back home.

Many Somali women wear headdresses like many Muslim women do. Younger women do not necessarily always wear the traditional clothing, but head coverings are especially prevalent with older, married women. The tradition of henna in the Arabian Peninsula also has a high representation in Somali culture. The art is worn on special occasions such as weddings and Ramadan. Fasting for Ramadan is common for Muslim cultures, so knowing of this is important. Ramadan is considered the most important holiday on the Muslim calendar. It involves fasting from sunrise to sunset and a great feast at the end of the holiday season.

It is important to note that Somali Americans are new to this country in general and some have not fully adapted to the new culture of the US. This is not true of all Somali Americans but their culture in this country is still young and emerging. When interacting with a Somali American, be respectful of his or her cultural traditions and religion, too. Also be aware that the Sunni Muslim population has numerous dietary restrictions. This can save you an embarrassing mistake if you were to share a meal with someone from Somalia.

Sources: [everyculture.com](http://everyculture.com), [education.mnhs.org](http://education.mnhs.org), [cia.gov](http://cia.gov)



**Open Your Eyes**

When you go to the mall, take notice of the employees. How many are immigrants?

**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.



# Connections

By Angie Quantrell

with Somali Americans

## SPORTS

### Soccer

## BASKETBALL



### Conversation Starters

- I love cooking. I've been reading about foods from Somalia. How do you say *muufo*? How do you make it?
- Football (soccer) is popular in my neighborhood. Do you play football? Have you watched American football?
- Our family has a dinner on New Year's Day. What do you do to celebrate the new year?

### Culture 101

- In Somalia, women and men do not socialize in public. Be considerate of this possibility.
- Somalis are a new group of immigrants to America. Be helpful.
- Respect clan connections, which may be retained by American Somalis.
- Independence, self-reliance, and hard work are valued.

### What I've Learned from Them

- Somalis are a resilient people. Despite political issues and war in Somalia, hard work and efforts to do well show a strong people.
- American Somalis moved to America to have a better chance for a safe, healthy, and happy life.
- Families are important to Somalis. We have a common bond in our love for our families.

## Going Further

**1** Set up a cooking night and invite Somali friends for dinner. Teach them how to make your favorite meal. Avoid pork. Invite them to teach you how to make their favorite meal.

**2** Invite a Somali family to visit a local zoo or aquarium. Talk about favorite animals and family

activities. Encourage your friends to share about their home country.

**3** Over coffee, ask Somali friends to share about their faith. Ask if you can tell about Jesus and what He taught through the Bible.

**4** Host a game night. Invite Somali friends over and play board games. Ask Somali friends to tell about games they enjoy.

**5** Invite Somali friends over to watch American football. Toss around a football during commercials. Explain how the game is played.



## Building Bridges

On a recent trip to Seattle, I met a Somali woman at a department store. She had a lovely henna design on her hands.

"I love your henna design!" I said.

"Thank you," she replied.

"Did you do it yourself?" I asked.

"No, my sister did it," she answered.

"We do each other's henna."

"You are talented. Tell me about the design," I said.

The young woman explained the henna. We parted shortly thereafter, but I am hoping this simple conversation laid groundwork for others who come after me and visit with this Somali woman.



**3.** The left hand is considered unclean and is not used for eating.

**4.** Be aware of Ramadan and other Muslim holidays. Fasting and feasting are important symbols of Muslim beliefs.

**5.** Avoid bringing up the political situation in Somalia.

**ANGIE QUANTRELL** writes from the Yakima Valley, where many new groups of inter-nationals are beginning to settle.

# Serbian Americans

SERBIAN AMERICANS HAVE strong representation in the Midwest and North, specifically in Pennsylvania

and Illinois. Larger communities of Serbs can be found in Chicago, Milwaukee, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh.

Serbia's current state in Eastern Europe emerged from the secession of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Macedonia from Yugoslavia in the early '90s. Since then, Serbia has faced numerous economic and political problems but remains a strong culture and nation. Many Serbs have immigrated to the United States because of many years of war in their country, including WWII and conflicts throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

The principle religion of the Serbian people is the Serbian Orthodox church. This religion was founded by King Stefan Prvovenčani in 1219 and is important to one's identity as a Serb. It differs from traditional Catholicism because priests are allowed to marry and it uses the Julian calendar, which is celebrated 13 days behind the Gregorian calendar. So, many Serbian Americans celebrate Christmas on January 7th.

Family is very close knit in Serbian society. In Serbia, a family hierarchy exists with many generations living in a household together and working for a common goal. Serbian American communities are different because the large households are not as commonly seen here. The family ties are still strong though, and seeing a grandparent living with her children and grandchildren is not uncommon.



Beyond family, one of the most important things to Serbian Americans is *Srpsstvo*, or being Serbian. It means adhering to the religious standards of the Serbian Orthodox Church, speaking the Serbian language, and keeping cultural standards alive. Serbian language is very important. Cultural traditions like Serbian cuisine and music are important for maintaining *Srpsstvo* and cultural identity. Serbian music has a folksy feel to it and emphasizes string instruments like a *tamburitza*, a mandolin-like instrument, and a *gusle*, which is like a violin. These instruments are often used for celebratory events and gatherings. To accompany this music, the tradition of dance is vital as well. The *kolo* is the Serbian national dance and common at Serbian American gatherings. It is done either in a line or circle and the dancers hold each other's hands or belts and then begin the springy dance steps to the music.

Serbian Americans tend to be direct in communication, so do not be afraid to talk to a new acquaintance about any number of topics you are passionate about with a loud and clear tone. Strong eye contact is a must, too. Be broadminded and listen to the things they are passionate about as well. The only topics one should avoid would be any historical controversy about Ser-

bia, especially when talking about their relationships with neighboring countries. This could come off as offensive and rude. Playing soccer and casual socializing are common ways of interacting with a new friend, too.



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# Connections

By Diana C. Derringer

## With Serbian Americans

### Conversation Starters

- Shop at neighborhood Serbian stores, if any. Strike up a conversation with the owners or workers, with the goal of developing friendships.
- Inquire at local schools of Serbian students or families you can befriend.
- Request traditional recipes from Serbian-American friends. Make the dishes together or ask them to taste your best efforts.
- Attend soccer or other games of Serbian neighbors. Invite them to your family, church, or school games.
- Ask about family members. Admire photos. Jot down the names soon after, so you can inquire about family by name during future contacts.
- Become social networking friends.



### Add Friend

- Invite Serbian friends to introduce you to their traditional songs, instruments, and dance.
- Organize get-togethers to acquaint Serbian Americans with other neighbors and friends.

### Culture 101

- Serbian Americans tend to have close extended family relationships.
- Traditional patriarchal families are common.
- This people group enjoys visits and conversation.
- Serbian identity is valued.
- A strong tie exists between Serbian and religious (Orthodox) identity.



### Open Your Eyes

When you go to the mall, take notice of the employees. How many are immigrants?

**DIANA DERRINGER**, a former social worker and adjunct professor, serves with her husband as a friendship family to international university students.

### Going Further

- 1 Request assistance in learning and using Serbian words and traditions. Practice new words when together.
- 2 Offer to tutor Serbian-American friends who struggle with the English language.
- 3 Invite Serbian-Americans to your traditional Christmas activities. Request permission to participate in part of their January Christmas celebration.
- 4 Ask about their faith. Seek permission to share yours. Respectfully discuss similarities and differences in your beliefs and traditions.



1. Do not initiate discussion about past Serbian conflicts.
2. Do not wear shoes into a traditional Serbian home. Remove them at the door.
3. Do not point at anyone with one finger.

### What I've Learned from Them

- Both men and women may greet one another with a kiss, typically three kisses on alternating cheeks.
- First-time guests should take a small gift, such as flowers or food.
- Individual families have a patron saint and honor their saint in a special celebration each year.
- The Serbian language does not have separate words for siblings and cousins.

*The National Museum (right) in Serbia and the Museum of Contemporary Art house national collections of classical and contemporary art.*

### Building Bridges

When we think of Serbia, many of us recall television images of ethnic fighting in that region during the 1990s. Former president Slobodan Milosevic and his policies tainted the world's perception of the Serbian people. As a result, we may view Serbian Americans with suspicion, questioning their loyalty to a regime that advocated ethnic cleansing. How sad when we base our knowledge on nothing more than those troubling news reports.

We must move beyond such preconceived notions. Intentional or not, labeling limits our effectiveness as we seek to share friendship and faith with any group of people. However, by establishing personal relationships, we often find individuals who had no control over the situations they faced.

A few years ago, on a missions trip to a country that endured similar leadership, several people we met apologized for their country's actions. They wanted us to know that was not who they are. They stole our hearts as we worked together to restore a land with individual and religious freedom.

Regardless of a person's ethnic background, beliefs, or past circumstances, we have a gift that can unite us. When we accept Jesus' love and forgiveness, we become one.

PETAR MILOŠEVI





# Chinese Americans

CHINESE AMERICANS ARE A significant part of the United States as the largest group of Asian descent

in the country. The population is dispersed throughout the US, but the areas of highest concentration are California, New York, and Hawaii. The cities claiming the most Chinese Americans are New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco.

In understanding Chinese culture, many people forget how diverse the population of China is in the first place. China has the largest population in the world at around 1.35 billion people. This is more than four times the population of the United States in a geographic area that is only slightly smaller. Ethnically, the majority of Chinese citizens claim Han Chinese, but the Chinese government recognizes 55 official ethnic groups. China's official language is Mandarin, but the number of languages spoken within China rivals that of most continents. Mandarin is spoken by 70 percent of Han Chinese, particularly in the major northern cities, but Yue, Wu, Minbei, Minnan, Xiang, Gan, Hakka, and dozens of other dialects exist within the country. These languages may share a character-based writing system but sound nothing alike. This goes to show that Chinese Americans come from many different and varied origins not easily defined.

Seventy-six percent of Chinese Americans 18 and older were not born in the US. Therefore, the connection to China is very strong. Language is also of great importance. According to Pew Research, 52 percent of Chinese Americans say it is very important for Chinese to be spoken



*As the largest group of Asian descent in the country, Chinese Americans are dispersed throughout the United States, with the highest concentrations in New York City (above), Los Angeles, and San Francisco. In what ways can you reach out to Chinese Americans near you?*

by future generations. A common trait many Chinese cultures share is a high value on family and close friends. If America values the individual, China in contrast values the collective. Sacrificing to take care of your relationships is seen as an honor and responsibility many times. Paying and tending to your parents in their old age falls most often on the children.

Most Chinese define themselves as nonreligious. This is the case with Chinese Americans as well. The most common religious connection is with Buddhism. A small percent of Christians resides within China and a more significant percentage in the US, but Christianity is still considered a subgroup.

One way to connect with those of strong Chinese heritage is to treat them to a meal, either out or at your home. It is not uncommon for friends to treat one another to a meal or a movie. Small gifts are also an acceptable way to show you value someone as a friend. If you choose to cook yourself, it is probably best not to attempt Chinese

cuisine unless you have experience with it already. If you are set on cooking, make sure to avoid a partially Americanized dish like chow mein or chop suey.

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# Connections

By Virginia Kreimeyer

## With Chinese Americans

### SPORTS



table tennis  
badminton  
chess  
basketball  
soccer  
diving  
tae kwon do  
tai chi



### Conversation Starters

- Family is important, so ask, "How is your family?" Or ask, "How are your parents?" or "How is your son or daughter [insert their name if you know it]?"

- Eating is also important, so ask, "Have you eaten yet?" or "Would you like to join me for lunch?" Or maybe ask, "Would you like to come to dinner at my house?"

- Sports is another area of importance, so ask, "Which sports do you play?" or "Which American sports do you follow?"



### Open Your Eyes

What is the name of your doctor? Is she an international? Ask her to tell you a little about her country. Keep the dialog going as you make return visits.

## Going Further

1 Pray for Chinese Americans.

2 Invite them to participate at your church events, especially those involving the entire family.

3 Tell them about God because many may have grown up atheist. According to Pew Research, in 2010, 68 million Christians lived

in China. While there are Christian churches in China, your invitation to attend church may resolve their curiosity and lead them and their family to Christ.

4 Learn where they live. For example, I live in Texas, which is one of the four states with the most Chinese Americans.

### Culture 101

- Age matters in the Chinese culture, and respect is always shown to those older. For example, with twins, the firstborn is always the big brother/sister. So forever the younger twin will be the little brother/sister.

- Chinese are very polite, so it is customary to ask them more than once. For example, if you offer someone a drink, she will probably refuse it the first time, even if she really wants it. So, you should offer it at least three times. This way, she may appear to be humble in accepting it.



1. Never clean your plate. It is a sign that you are still hungry.

2. Self-respect and dignity are extremely important in Chinese culture. Avoid embarrassing a Chinese friend, especially in front of others.

3. Because good health is important, drugs are considered taboo.

### What I've Learned from Them

- My Chinese friends demonstrated respect because I was their teacher.

- I learned to drink hot water in China, because cold drinks are not considered good for your health.

- Chinese love to give gifts. If you invite them somewhere, you can expect a gift because they want to show their appreciation.

- Education is important, and many of the Chinese Americans I know have degrees in medicine, science, or engineering.



- Making friends with Chinese Americans is easy because they want to know more about Americans and love to be invited into your home. Sharing a meal is one of the best ways to make a friend for life.

**VIRGINIA KREIMEYER** writes from Texas but has taught English in China. She has many Chinese friends. She thanks Lily, Amanda, and Phyllis, her friends in Texas and China, who helped with this article.

# Korean Americans

KOREAN AMERICANS LIVE throughout the United States, with large populations in California, New York, and New Jersey. The US is home to the

second-largest Korean diaspora after the People's Republic of China. The largest populations are in New York City, Los Angeles, and Baltimore.

In 1948, North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and South Korea (Republic of Korea) were officially formed into the countries they are today. North Korea has a communist government while South Korea is an emergent democracy. Almost all Korean Americans trace their ancestry to South Korea.

The Korean religion is predominantly Protestant. This is a somewhat new development because of extended interaction with the western world. Historically, religion within Korea has typically been Buddhism or shamanism. The new prevalence of Christianity is especially true for Korean Americans, and fits well for them upon their immigration to another predominantly Christian country. A significant Catholic population exists in South Korea now as well.

When the US passed the Immigration and Naturalization Act in 1965, a large influx of Koreans immigrated here. The act gave preference not only to those with American family members but also to skilled professionals.

A major source of Korean cultural preservation in America is through Korean churches. Korean Protestant churches have offered Korean language lessons for many years. These buildings also hold major celebrations for the first few days of the new year as well. Other major sources of Korean heritage include Korean language schools and Korean culture camps. These are both popular ways to keep Korean American children in touch with their tradition and history.

The family remains a huge part of Korean culture. Elders within the family are highly revered and respected. Children are usually expected to take care of their parents in their old age, even though the dynamic is changing from the traditional concept years ago in Korea. Children are also expected to choose a spouse who will go along well with the family and is approved especially by the parents. Arranged marriages are far less common in modern day.



Korean Americans have achieved a high demographic profile in some US cities, including New York City.

Getting involved in public events that occur most commonly at Korean church events is a great way to get in touch with Korean Americans. These events often occur around holidays and feature delicious Korean dishes like *kimchi*, a spicy cabbage dish, as well as fascinating examples of Korean art, music, and clothing.

The Korean peninsula has brought about an incredible amount of variety in the culture because of its history of interacting with many other nations. This combination of cultures has lead to a set of traditions and customs the Korean people are proud to share with anyone who is interested.



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**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.

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# Connections

By Diana C. Derringer

With Korean Americans

예의

## SPORTS

soccer,  
baseball  
tae-kwon-do  
ice hockey  
badminton

JASON GULLEDGE



Korean American Alex Yi is a retired American soccer defender who played for FC Dallas of Major League Soccer. He is currently head coach for the U18 academy team at Los Angeles Galaxy.

## Conversation Starters

- Invite Korean American friends to join you in preparing food from both countries. A shared meal becomes an event filled with learning, talking, and laughing.



- Tell Korean friends they don't have to eat any of your food they dislike. Otherwise, they will eat out of politeness.

- When offered second helpings, Korean friends may politely decline, even if they desire extra. Offer once or twice more. If still hungry, they may then accept. If not hungry, they will probably say the food is good but they are full.

- When Korean Americans invite you for a meal, they want you to feel at home and comfortable in accepting extra food when offered.

- Food everyone can share makes a nice gift when visiting a Korean American home.

## Culture 101

- Respect elders.
- Value education.
- Honor family.
- Work hard.
- Observe traditions.
- Practice politeness.

**DIANA DERRINGER**, a former social worker and adjunct professor, serves with her husband as a friendship family to international university students. Visit her at [dianaderringer.com](http://dianaderringer.com).

## Going Further

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**1** Develop an understanding of basic Korean culture before meeting new friends. They will appreciate your interest and eagerly answer questions.

**2** Learn and use Korean words. A traditional Korean greeting will bring a smile to your friends' faces and open new doors of opportunity.

**3** Participate in special festivals, such as New Year celebrations, sharing the food, music, clothing, and other traditional activities.

*Korean traditional dancers march at the Annual Dance Parade in Manhattan.*

## Getting to Know Them

Two international university students stayed with us during fall break. While visiting a nearby state park, we recognized several other students preparing a Korean barbeque. They invited us to join them and gazed in amazement when I ate everything offered. Their delicacies included a blend of seafood and vegetables not seen on the typical American table. Identifying myself as a longtime fan of kimchi made it official—I became "one of them."



**1.** Younger people should not call Korean elders by their first name. This is considered rude or a sign of disrespect. Use Mr. or Mrs. and the last name instead.

**2.** Do not wear shoes into a Korean home. Remove them at the door.



**Open Your Eyes**

Drive around the community of your church's location. Do any internationals live nearby?

## What I've Learned from Them

- Several missions trips and student guests have taught me that sharing a meal provides one of the best opportunities to develop international friendships.

- Korean Americans may bow in greeting or parting, although many also use a handshake. A younger person commonly bows to an elder. Young people may simply wave to a peer and say "hello" or "goodbye."

- Gift giving resembles practices in the United States. Try to find something the recipient likes.

- If you say the casual "Come see us," expect a visit. You may be taken literally when you tell Korean friends you need to "go there," "do that," or "get together" again. Learning you were not serious can be disappointing.



# Ethiopian Americans

ETHIOPIAN AMERICANS LIVE throughout the United States, but their major concentrations include

Washington, DC; New York City; and Dallas/Ft. Worth. Washington, DC has the largest Ethiopian community, most likely based on its international identity as the capital. Ethiopians have been the largest African group immigrating to the US from 1982 to 1994. After 1994, only Somalis exceeded them in number of immigrations.

Religion is a strong force in Ethiopia. Though the official religion in the country is Ethiopian Orthodox, all three Abrahamic religions—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—thrive there. Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity combines many of the traditional Christian beliefs with concepts about good and evil spirits. The Ark of the Covenant is also a major symbol in many Ethiopian Orthodox churches. This is because numerous archaeologists believe the ark can be found somewhere in Ethiopia. Saturdays and Sundays are considered Sabbath days, and fasting is common during holy days. Music is also commonly incorporated into mass. This Eastern African country located in the horn of Africa is said to hold many different



*Ethiopian businesses along Fairfax Avenue in Little Ethiopia, Los Angeles.*

"LITTLE ETHIOPIA" BY MINNAERT

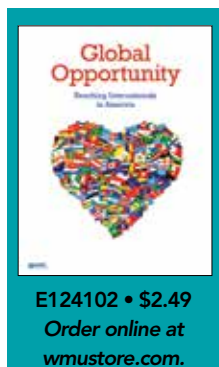
ethnic groups as well. Some of these include the Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray.

Ethiopian food is very popular with restaurants and served worldwide. It is considered to be a mix between Cajun and Middle Eastern cuisine. It features similar foods like lentils, potatoes, and olive oil. It is also infamous for the use of red pepper. A popular Ethiopian dessert is a dryer, sweeter form of Greek baklava.

Ethiopian clothing is also famous throughout the world. Both men and women are known for wearing a white, cotton, robe-like garment called a *shamma*. Traditionally, men wear white cotton pants beneath the shamma and women wear colorful dresses. Men in higher rank wear *kamis*. This silk tunic is color-coded in accordance with rank.

One of the most prominent gathering celebrations in Ethiopian culture is a funeral. Death is a highly ritualized and revered process. The body is washed and taken to the church to be wrapped in cloth and blessed only a few hours after death. The deceased body is buried in a shallow grave and songs are sung over the loss. The grave is marked by a pile of stones in the shape of a pyramid instead of a tombstone. The days following the death are specifically planned as mourning times where specific services called *tezkar* are held.

It is often hard for Ethiopians to feel accepted and at home in America. This is because the Ethiopian community itself, though growing, is still relatively small. First generation immigrants often seek support from other Ethiopians and feel most comfortable when surrounded by respectful people who are familiarized with their customs and culture.



Do you work with internationals? What countries are they from? Have you had more than a casual conversation with them?

**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.



# Connections

By Brittany Conner

## With Ethiopian Americans

### SPORTS

Distance running  
Soccer  
Basketball



### Conversation Starters

- Greet your Ethiopian friend with the standard *selam* (seh-LAHM), which means "peace."
- Ethiopians value family above everything else. Show interest in your friend's family by asking about his or her relatives and their well-being.
- Nearly half of Ethiopians follow the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, but a growing number are Ethiopian Muslims.

**1.** If your friend is Orthodox Christian, she most likely will celebrate Epiphany, which is the largest celebration of the year. Ask her about this celebration and what it means to her.

**2.** If she is Muslim, she will soon be observing Ramadan, a time when Muslims around the world fast and seek to draw closer to Allah. Ask your friend if you can pray for her during this time for God to reveal Himself to her.

## UNIVERSAL Language

I attended college with Amir, a shy, quiet young man from Ethiopia who ran our school bookstore. I didn't know much about Amir or his East African country other than his love of running and reverence for coffee. Running I could never embrace, but coffee . . . that's a universal language anyone can appreciate.



## Going Further

**1** Ethiopian Americans foster formal friendships that value respect and honor. If inviting an Ethiopian American to dinner, make the extra effort to dress semi-formally and prepare an environment that reflects honor and value for your guest.

**2** Coffee is a national drink of Ethiopia and is enjoyed in a ritual, formal environment. Invite an Ethiopian American friend to enjoy quality coffee and pastries. Set large pillows on the floor

to create a traditional Ethiopian setting for coffee, and be prepared to linger for at least an hour as you and your friend slowly sip and savor the experience.



*Axum, Ethiopia—A young woman in traditional clothing is preparing a coffee ceremony. The man is playing on a masenqo. This ceremony is an important part of the Ethiopian culture.*



considered inconsiderate, even to the giver.

**1** If you receive a gift, do not open it in public. This is



**2** Do not use your left hand for anything, especially eating or shaking hands. The left hand is viewed as unclean.

**BRITTANY CONNER** lives in Jacksonville, Florida, where she writes and chases her four children, including toddler triplets.

### Culture 101

- If invited to your Ethiopian friend's home, bring the host a small, inexpensive gift such as a dessert or flowers.
- Greet each other with a formal handshake and eye contact. Familiar friends often greet each other with three kisses to the cheeks.
- Coffee will almost always be offered when visiting an Ethiopian American's home, and it is considered rude to refuse.
- *Gursa* is a process by which one guest may serve another guest a tasty morsel during a party by using her hands to place food inside the other guest's mouth. This sharing is a sign of respect and should be received with a smile.



# Salvadoran Americans

SALVADORAN AMERICANS ARE the fourth-largest Hispanic group in the United States after Mexican Americans,

Puerto Rican Americans, and Cuban Americans. Their areas of highest concentration include the states of California and Texas. Los Angeles has a very large population, but all the major cities in Texas have a large representation of Salvadoran Americans, too. This includes Houston, Dallas/Ft. Worth, and Austin.

El Salvador (“the Savior”) is a country in Central America with a population of a little more than six million. Salvadoran immigration to the US is a relatively new occurrence. The largest migration occurred during the Salvadoran civil war between 1980 and 1990, when approximately a quarter of the country’s population left the country. About a million of those refugees came to the US.

About 57 percent of Salvadorans are members of the Roman Catholic Church, but a growing number of Protestants and a small representation of Jews and Muslims exist as well. Many Salvadorans observe special cultural rituals around traditional church holidays and the *quinceañera*, the celebration of a girl’s fifteenth birthday. Salvadorans are not as strict regarding some church rituals as other Latin American countries are. Marriages, for instance, are sometimes merely common law because the traditional church wedding is considered too expensive. The birth of a new child and the naming of the godparents is still extremely important in Salvadoran culture though. Special importance is placed upon the relationship with the *padrino* and *madrino*, or the godfather and godmother.

A rich history of Salvadoran folklore and tradition also abounds. It includes tales of the dangerous and beautiful *Siguanaba*, who lures unsuspecting travelers to their doom. The legends also speak of *Los Cadejos*, two giant dogs of black and white that bring on either good or bad luck. However, these stories are not as prevalent in many younger generations who have lost connection to the older legends.



Listen to the construction workers in your neighborhood. What language are they speaking? Where are they from?

Salvadoran Americans form close-knit and strong communities in the US. They previously had a shared identity as refugees fleeing a tumultuous political and social climate. Now they are a community tied together by culture, family, and history. Many still have extended family members in El Salvador. The civil war divided many households and families in the twentieth century. Salvadorans place a high value on family, both immediate and extended. Modern Salvadorans still have high immigration rates to the US though as they seek opportunity as well as reuniting with family.

Getting involved in the Salvadoran community can be difficult since their bonds are so strong, but an interest in learning

and sincerity usually go a long way. If you want to connect to the community, get involved with Salvadoran food. It is considered sweeter and milder than Mexican food and is based strongly on cornmeal tortillas. Popular dishes include *pupusas* and mango slices.

**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.

# Connections

By Ann Knowles

## With Salvadoran Americans

### SPORTS



**Fútbol** (football/soccer) is the most common sport in El Salvador. The most popular teams are the national football teams. The local football clubs have many good players but the national sports hero is retired player Jorge "El Mágico" Gonzalez (top left).

Hiking	Kayaking	Folk
Surfing	Jogging	dancing
Fishing	Baseball	

### Culture 101

- The culture is relationship oriented and has a strong sense of personal honor and dignity.
- Salvadorans expect cleanliness, neatness, and conservative dress.
- Personal space is less than an arm's length, and with family and good friends, it may be even closer.
- Men and women shake hands.
- Eye contact is expected during conversations; staring is rude.
- Elders are honored and respected.
- A relationship is formal until a Salvadoran invites you to be on a first-name basis.
- Salvadorans are very friendly.
- *Pupusas*, or stuffed corn tortillas, are the most traditional food.

Sources:  
everyculture.com  
cia.gov  
pewhispanic.org

**ANN KNOWLES** lives in Wilmington, North Carolina. She and her husband, Stan, attend Bolivia Baptist Church in Bolivia, North Carolina.

## Going Further

- 1 Take a Spanish survival course in order to communicate effectively.
- 2 Go online to learn more about El Salvador and its people. (Everyculture.com is a helpful resource.)
- 3 Accompany them on their first visit to a Hispanic church.
- 4 Introduce them as your friends from El Salvador.
- 5 Invite them to your home for a holiday meal such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter.
- 6 Plan a cookout with games for adults and children.



- Never arrive on time when invited to a home. Plan to be 30–45 minutes late.

*Who needs a clock?*



- Refrain from eating any kind of food with your fingers. Even fruit is eaten with a knife and fork.
- Do not visit a home without a hostess gift—flowers, pastries, or imported sweets. Even perfume is acceptable if you know the person well.
- Don't give lilies or marigolds as they are usually for funerals.
- Don't yawn without covering your mouth.
- Don't put your feet up on a desk or chair in social or business settings.



### Building Bridges

I was an English as a second language teacher in an elementary school with 38 percent Spanish-speaking children. One day while shopping, I noticed a young couple searching for something and I asked if I could help. I introduced myself and asked them where their children attended school, thinking perhaps they were in my class. Enrique and Maria proudly told me they were from El Salvador. They smiled and thanked me several times. They appreciated my help and were clearly delighted to meet a new friend. I invited them to visit the Hispanic church near my home on Sunday afternoons and offered to go with them.



# Brazilian Americans

## AMERICANS OF BRAZILIAN

decent are becoming a more prominent group within the United States. They

are developing large communities in states such as Florida, Massachusetts, and California, and many cities such as Miami, Atlanta, Boston, and New York City boast a significant population as well. New York City's West 46th Street is a famous Brazilian neighborhood called "Little Brazil."

Brazil is a strong Catholic country. It is also the sixth-largest country in the world with a population of more than 200 million. About 65 percent of that population is Roman Catholic, which officially makes Brazil the largest Catholic nation in the world. The rest of the population normally ascribes to varying forms of Protestantism, with a very small percentage claiming nothing at all. Religion may be the only factor where Brazilians don't have an amazing level of diversity. Individuals of actual Portuguese descent make up only a slight majority of the population. The people of Brazil have ethnic origins ranging from countries in Africa, Italy, Germany, Japan, and many other countries. The Native Brazilian populations (particularly the Tupí and Guarani) are significant as well and interwoven into the traditional customs of the nation. Brazilian Americans are a reflection of the diversity of their homeland.

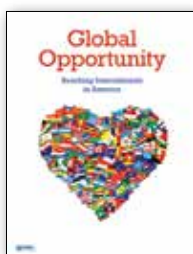
Brazilian Americans have a very strong connection to family, including extended family. These ties, which many Americans would place little value on, mean a great deal in the Brazilian community. In fact, many times new immigrants from Brazil will come to America to live with their family members in the



Manhattan, New York City

new country. It is not uncommon to know your grandmother and your cousins as your neighbors and houseguests on many occasions. Brazilians are commonly referred to as Latino, which is disputed between the populations. The term *Latino* is used to refer to a person originating from Latin or South America, or a person of Hispanic descent. Brazilians are, of course, from South America, but their origin, like their language, is Portuguese. So the term *Latino* is not necessarily applicable and the term *Hispanic* is definitely incorrect.

One way to connect to the Brazilian community is to join in its holiday celebrations if possible. Many Brazilian Americans celebrate traditional holidays of the US in addition to Brazilian ones. Many major holidays in Brazil revolve around the Catholic calendar, like Holy Week and Easter, but the celebration of Carnival is considered by many to be the quintessential expression of Brazilian culture, consisting of Brazilian cuisine, dance, and costumes. Many Brazilian communities have incredible Carnival celebrations. This holiday occurs the four days before Lent each year. Brazil's Independence Day, September 7th, is often commemorated by a parade. In the US, the largest independence celebration and feast is on West 46th Street in New York, but many similar celebrations can be found among the Brazilian community in other cities as well. If you are trying to strike up a conversation, a safe place to start is with *futebol* (American soccer). Though one cannot generalize that every member of this culture enjoys sports, most Brazilians really love their *futebol*. It is not uncommon for friends and family to get together and watch the sport on television or attend a game.



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**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.



# Connections

By Janice Backer

## With Brazilian Americans

### SPORTS



SHUTTERSTOCK/A. EINSIEDLER

- Footvolley (a combination of beach volleyball and soccer)
- Soccer
- Volleyball
- Martial arts—Capoeira
- Skateboarding

### In the Know

- Be informed. Check out library books about Brazil or search [everyculture.com](http://everyculture.com) to learn the basics about the country: geography, history, culture, music, cuisine.

- Be curious. Ask questions about the country to find common ground.

- Be adventurous. Find Brazilian recipes at [allrecipes.com](http://allrecipes.com).



### CULTURE 101

- Brazilians enjoy family.
- Celebrating or partying with family and friends often is very important.
- This people group tends to avoid confrontation.
- Brazilians try not to offend others.
- Many Brazilians express a happy-go-lucky attitude.



Visit a nationwide pharmacy and ask how many languages are available for its prescriptions. How many of these internationals live around you?

**JANICE BACKER** is a freelance writer in Jacksonville, Florida.

## Going Further

- 1 Invite them to your home for a meal, not fast food but a leisurely dinner where there is time to socialize.
- 2 Call them often. Since they may not have extended family and may be homesick, call to check on them.
- 3 Include them in any family gathering—birthday, anniversary, baby shower, graduation.
- 4 Ask them about their special holidays and throw a party to celebrate.
- 5 Invite them to join you for American holidays—Memorial Day, Independence Day, and Thanksgiving.



Two hand gestures that Americans may think innocuous are for Brazilians

offensive and vulgar:

1. "OK" (thumb and index finger in the shape of an "O" and the last three fingers extended) is a vulgar slang that will offend any Brazilian.
2. "Hook 'em horns" (thumb, middle and ring finger pinched together with index and pinkie extended) that University of Texas students proudly lift up, indicates to a Brazilian that someone's wife has committed adultery.

### What I've Learned from Them

- Brazilians are relational people. Social contact is important and being part of a family or group is vital for them.
- In Brazil, gas stations are still full service. We can be a friend by showing them how to pump gas.
- New Year's Eve is a big deal for Brazilians. They gather together for suppers or parties and wait for midnight. Everyone wears white clothes to "bring peace into the new year," and the frivolity lasts until early the next morning.

- The largest Brazilian Baptist church in America is in Pompano Beach, Florida.

- We need to be more welcoming. An estimated 75 percent of international college students have never seen the inside of an American family's home.

*Fireworks dazzle the sky in Copacabana on New Year's Eve.*



DMITRY\_ISLENTEV / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

# Hmong Americans

THE HMONG POPULATION is much smaller than that of other major Asian groups both domestically and

globally. They are a relatively small people group. However, despite their smaller population, overall they are still the most significant Asian population in Minnesota and Wisconsin. As is a demographic trend with most Asian Americans, the state with the most Hmong is California, but Minneapolis–St. Paul is the most populous metro area for the Hmong.

The Hmong people's historical beginnings are disputed by a number of groups, but there is a general consensus that the ethnicity can draw its origin back to China, near the Huang He (Yellow River) Basin. It is considered a subgroup of the Miao ethnicity (one of the recognized ethnicities in China). However, the population has expanded in Asia to parts of northern Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. In 1975, the American government began resettling the Hmong in the United States as refugees from Laos. The major immigration wave to the US then began throughout the 1980s.

Most traditional Hmong are religiously tied to a pantheistic religion, which teaches that spirits live in all things. It involves shamanism, ancestor worship, and the cult of spirits. On the basis of Hmong religious belief, there are two worlds.

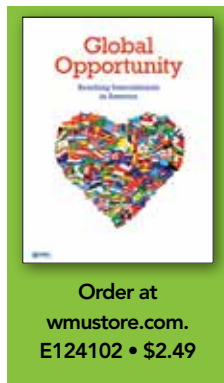
The invisible world (*yeeb ceeb*) where the spirits reside and the visible world (*yaj ceeb*) that holds human beings and material objects. However, some Hmong have converted to Christianity upon arriving in America. This has caused fractures in Hmong family life as well and changes in many traditional Hmong ceremonies.



Hmong Americans are recognized for a successful recycling program to recycle and reduce food waste in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Most Hmong have a generally positive view of the US. More than one-third of Hmong Americans were born in this country, which is a much higher rate than that of other groups. Because the Hmong population is very young generally, the number of Hmong with direct connections to Laos or their traditional culture is depleting. This is why preserving the Hmong culture is very important to the community. They have traditional ceremonies and festivals that require traditional dress, including women wearing Thai or Lao dresses with a green or pink sash, while men have a hat with a pink knot on top. This dress varies greatly based on the country of origin the Hmong come from. The most important event of the year for the Hmong is the Hmong New Year (*noj peb caug*). In Laos, this holiday begins with the crowing of the first rooster on the first day of the new moon in the twelfth month, or harvest time, and lasts four to seven days. The scheduling is somewhat more flexible in America and does not usually last as long, but it always takes place around the time of the new moon in December. Celebrations in America also present an opportunity to reaffirm traditional Hmong displays such as dances to Asiatic music.

Hmong are a hard-working and driven people. They are happy to socialize and interact with anyone who shows an interest in their culture. If you are interested and respectful, then making a friend won't be difficult. The most common mistake many people in the US make is confusing the Hmong for another Asian group like the Chinese or Vietnamese. This is considered offensive, so be careful not to put your foot in your mouth.



**REX WALKER** is a writer from Memphis who loves good movies, good cheesecake, and good people. This world is full of different cultures, and he wants to experience as many of them as he possibly can.

# Connections

By Christy Bell

## With Hmong Americans

### SPORTS

#### Soccer Volleyball Topspin



### Conversation Starters

- Traditional Hmong religion teaches that a king will lead the people to salvation from their enemies. Explain your belief about Jesus as the risen King. Use this as a springboard to share the plan of salvation with them.

- Many Hmong women have large families and care for young children. Offer to babysit younger children so the mother can run errands.



LAUREN AVA / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

### Culture 101

- Many Hmong Americans believe in reincarnation.
- Traditional New Year ceremonies are a way to cleanse the people of evil spirits and an appeal for good fortune.
- In America, New Year celebrations are used to teach the next generation about Hmong culture.
- Many Hmong American women are knowledgeable in herbal medicines and some may cultivate herbal gardens.



**CHRISTY BELL** writes from Talladega, Alabama, where she enjoys learning about other cultures.

## Going Further

**1** As children, we've all tried to see how long we could spin a top. Hmong Americans have taken spinning to a whole new level. Topspin, or *too lu* as it is traditionally called, has been played by the Hmong people for hundreds of years. Players tie a string to a long pole and wrap the string around a wooden top. When the top is hurled, it can spin up to 70 miles per hour!

**2** Many Hmong communities have topspin games and tournaments on the weekends. Use these events as a way to minister to Hmong Americans. Supply bottled water to players and their families. Share about Jesus as the "Water of Life."

**3** Attend a Hmong American July 4th or New Year celebration. Use this as an opportunity to learn about Hmong culture and establish new friendships.

**4** Hmong women traditionally create beautiful embroidery artwork. If you enjoy being creative, start a needlework club and invite Hmong women. Ask them to teach you some tricks.



- Traditional Hmong Americans do not shake hands.
- Limit touching during conversations.
- Pointing is thought to be disrespectful.
- Do not show the soles of your feet.
- Do not comment on the beauty of a child. Traditional Hmong believe evil spirits might hear and take away the soul of the child.
- Direct eye contact is considered rude.

### What I've Learned From Them:

- They value large family and traditional Hmong culture.
- They value hard work and integrity.



Initiate a conversation with one stranger today. Was it easier than you thought? Write the person's name down and how you felt about your time together.