

Auntyji Ko Pucho

By: Auntyji

Lately, Auntyji has had a lot of guests, and showing them around has put her in contact with a lot of people out there and has given her a chance to observe and see how we interact with each other.

South Florida is a big tourist Mecca, so it attracts visitors from all over the world. These people bring their own cultures and values, along with their own individual mannerisms and beliefs, and it is interesting to see how they all translate in a different environment and affect our behavior. Auntyji is not trying to pass judgment, but is merely sharing some of her reflections.

There was this friend who was visiting from one of the far south Asian countries who thought it was perfectly acceptable to burp and let out gas whenever she felt the urge. She argued that it was a bodily function that was perfectly normal, and one should not be embarrassed about it or try to suppress it, as that can cause more harm and bodily discomfort. Auntyji could not fault her logic, and is very aware that in certain cultures such practices are perfectly acceptable, and even encouraged (like burping as a sign that you have enjoyed a good meal). However, when practiced standing in line for a ride at Disney World, she was rewarded with rude stares and laughter from the crowds.

Being in a crowded location, Auntyji also got first hand experience in how different cultures tend to greet each other. Her traditional desi friends continued with the namastes, while some of her far eastern country friends were even more reserved and stood back and bowed. Most of the other people seemed to want some kind of a human touch with either a touch on the shoulder, a hand shake, a peck on the cheek, a hug, or a kiss.

Auntyji always carries a sanitizer in her bag because you never know where that hand or mouth has been. Some folks get offended by a certain kind of greeting, but they should remember that it is meant to be a friendly gesture. Auntyji still remembers the time when her friends from college in India had a reunion here, and the guys were walking down the street with their arms around each other, totally oblivious of the signal they were sending and of the stares they were getting. That is how one shows camaraderie in India and it means nothing more.

A lot of times, it is at meal times when people start discussing issues and the differences come out. Many are about politics and religion ... and Auntyji really tries to steer clear from those two topics. At other times, things come out of nowhere and leave her completely flabbergasted. Like the other day while she was having lunch with some of her guests, a vegetarian friend of hers objected to Auntyji eating butter chicken because she found it offensive. Auntyji could have found some validity with this argument if she were eating a bloody steak or tandoori chicken which might be visually disturbing, but this friend was objecting because of the fact that Auntyji was eating meat. There were a host of issues that Auntyji could have found to become disagreeable with this friend, yet Auntyji was not about to enforce her opinions to make someone else change their behavior to please her.

This country seems to have embraced the philosophy of 'live and let live'. Americans pride themselves on their freedom and the right to choose. Here we have the right of free speech, the right to bear arms, yet we do not have the right to choose whom we want to marry. And technically speaking, we do not even elect our own president. In this great promised land, it took a long time to abolish slavery, give the black people voting rights, but we still do not believe in equal rights for all our citizens. We as a society have formed certain norms, many of which might be flawed. We have created a government which has laws, some of which might be biased. A young person who is eighteen can drive a car, vote, buy a gun, get married, have children, get divorced, etc., but cannot drink a beer. In the small town where Auntyji lives, it's illegal for a fortune teller to open a business, but you can walk down to the corner department store and buy a gun along with your case of beer.



Q: Dear Auntyji, I am a regular reader of CityMasala magazine. I work in one of the Disney World hotels in Orlando, Florida and deal with hundreds of tourists from around the world everyday. However, Indian tourists who travel from India always complain about everything. When they ask me about special bargains in the area, I help them out. Some of these Indians have more money than we have here in U.S.A but when we go to their offices in India, they treat us as poorly as they can until we bribe them to do the work that they are supposed to be doing in the first place. I am sure you are aware that Indian five star hotels have different rates for locals and foreigners. My question is - should we be nice to them when they come here or should we leave them to the mercy of taxi drivers and others who can rip them off like they do to us when we visit India ?

Yours, US in USA.

A: People are people. Some are kind and hardworking, others are selfish and lazy. You do what you think is right in trying to help them.

India does not function in the same way as America does. It seems that sometimes the only way one can get work done there is through bribing. The work culture is changing there, and laziness and bribes might become things of the past.

Auntyji remembers one trip she had taken a couple of years ago. It was to a country she had wanted to visit since she was a child. The taxi driver who took her to the hotel ripped her off. The hotel ripped her off with extra charges. Every restaurant tried to add additional items to the bill. People were rude and it seemed that everyone was just trying to squeeze money out of her. Even though the country was beautiful, the trip left a very unpleasant memory and she will never go back there again. All this is because of the people, not the place. A good person can create a great experience.

So, to answer your question, you should do what your heart tells you is the right thing to do. That will give you a good night's sleep.

Don't forget, life is short - live it to the fullest with attitude! Auntyji@citymasala.com.