

# Embracing Cultural Exploration

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*“Building Global Friendship”*

- CISV

At the age of 11, I was pushed into the world—quite literally—by being sent to summer camps abroad. I had always been curious about people, from any and all different parts of the world. I remember getting to have conversations about culture, traditions, religion, spirituality, and global friendships. The activities in those camps helped to foster a bond between us and build trust, which led us to view each other as other human beings who merely just come from different backgrounds. This early exposure instilled in me a deep sense of gratitude and curiosity towards people from all over the globe.

Growing up, I hadn't realized that there was more to life other than math and science. It wasn't until I was coincidentally placed in a sociology class, due to scheduling mishaps, that I discovered the world of humanities. It was really eye-opening to explore how our culture, social relationships, and history can impact how we see the world and behave in it. This gave me a whole new point of view on the complexities that shape our behaviors. It was especially interesting to see how different perspectives can be used to discuss the same human behaviors and why we think people do what they do.

This was one of the first times I started to reflect on not only macro sociological perspectives but also on my own inner circle of friends and family.

I was also embraced by my Indian friends who not only welcomed me into their culture but encouraged me to explore the vast diversity within India itself. One of them even gifted me with a book to help me explore that further. The conversations about religions and spirituality really tied everything together for me in terms of understanding their culture and traditions in a deeper sense. I actually felt at home in India because of the similarities I found with my own culture and background. I think these experiences further showed me how we can be blinded by stereotypes sometimes but also how easily those can be broken with a simple conversation. I was also blessed with meeting people who were just as open to knowing more about me and my culture. I managed to create lifelong connections through a myriad of meaningful conversations.

I think I have always been a curious person, especially when it comes to culture and people. These experiences have shaped me into a more empathetic and culturally aware individual. I've learned to embrace diversity not as a mere concept but as a lived reality. With every conversation, I get to learn more about the rich spectrum of human experiences. As I envision my future, I see my cultural exploration journey as a lifelong pursuit. I hope to keep nurturing global friendships, breaking down cultural barriers, and fostering understanding. I wish for a world that not only celebrates diversity but also embraces our differences, leading to personal and collective growth.