

Newsletter December 2011



Dear Chameleon Friends,

This month's newsletter is the second and last trimestrial newsletter for 2011, and we are looking into providing you with interesting articles every following trimester. We would also like to take this opportunity to wish all of you a wonderful Christmas with your family and all the best for the New Year!

In this edition we will have a look at the traditional celebration of Christmas in the Merida region of Venezuela.

In this December issue:

- A Venezuelan Christmas
- Case study: "A culture shock turning sour"
- An insight into the OAR model, what is "Observe" about?

Viel Spass! Enjoy! Bonne lecture!

A Venezuelan Christmas

Christmas celebrations start on 16th December and end on the 24th when the child Jesus (Nino Jesus) is born. During that period families go to Mass (Misas de Aguinaldo) everyday and in their homes, set up a "pesebre" which represents a hilly region and replicates the manger at Bethlehem. In small villages (pueblos), families compete to who has the biggest and nicest "pesebre" and during the Christmas celebration period families walk the village to admire the masterpieces.

From the 16th to 24th December, streets are filled with music, dances and neighbours visit one another to share wine and food. Whilst they visit, a tradition is that one of the neighbours will steal the child Jesus and take it to his home. Thus, on the 24th of December, families having lost their child Jesus will go out in the neighbourhood and visit all their neighbours, have a glass of wine with them, share food and move on until they find their child Jesus.

The neighbours where the child Jesus is found are invited into the home for drinks and food, and at midnight the Nino Jesus is born and songs are being sung to him. Children get to open their presents.

The Paradura del Nino ends on January 6th, when the Three wise kings visit Mary. It ends with the family gathering around the pesebre with their close friends, dressed in their best attire. They will sing songs (Aguinaldos and Villancicos), play music and after the god mother and the god father will approach the pesebre, kneel in front of the child, raising him and carrying him around the house to finally put him on his feet between Mary and Joseph.

Case Study: “A culture shock turning sour”

Whilst I was working for a major German Telecom company I was given the opportunity to go for a year to Singapore. At that time I had met a young German Team Assistant that was also going to be relocated with her boyfriend over there. She left Germany before me, and we kept in contact until I arrived in Singapore.

When I arrived, she was telling me about her bad experiences with house hunting and with Singaporeans themselves, which I have to say made me feel a little bit anxious, however I knew I had to find out for myself. Luckily I met great people and was surrounded by new friends quite quickly. On the other hand she kept on running into bad experiences up to a point where she did not want to leave her home and go out and meet people. She had lost about 10kg in the space of 6 months and looked very sad and depressed so I decided to have a chat with her and understand what she was going through as I wanted to help her integrate better.

The major issue was that although she was with her boyfriend, she missed her family. She also unfortunately kept her bad experience present in every encounter she had with a local, meaning that for her, they were all after her and wanted to do bad things to her. Her mindset was so strong that she probably projected this on every single person she met and so could not integrate fully as she despised being around some of the locals.

What happened here? My friend had never left Germany in her life before she moved to Singapore, and had not undergone any preparation before she left. Probably that resulted in miscommunications and misunderstandings with her colleagues and contacts. Having a preparation and a constant contact with a coach could have helped her understand why she ran into problems, and could have spared her a depression which led her to leave the country after 8 months.

Many companies sending employees overseas experience early repatriation of these employees due to such experiences and lack of preparation.

An insight into the OAR Model, what is “Observe” about?

When you are relocated to a new country or if you travel to see your business counterparts abroad, you always leave with an agenda: either come back with a business deal or have a successful experience in your new host country.

Taking a little time to observe your counterpart or observe the culture you will be working in for the next year will be more beneficial than just going with the flow. It can strengthen your relationships and make your experience more enjoyable and successful as your counterpart will recognize your effort to fit in.

The objective of the “Observe” dimension of the model is to understand who you have in front of you. How do they speak (slowly, fast, calmly, ...), what is the language they speak in (could be English as a Foreign language so they may have an accent that you will have to understand), what non verbal cues are they providing you with (facial expressions and body language), how do they dress and how do they perceive space and time?

Observing is the first step of the OAR Model, in the next issue we will have a look at what “Replicate” is about.

If you have any questions, have any topics you would like us to tackle, or would like more information on the topics discussed, please feel free to email us.