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## OSV En Espanol

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I love Old Sturbridge Village. My kids love OSV. We became members several years back and I jumped at the opportunity this past fall to extend my membership for 3 years at a discounted rate.

My children are also fans of the Laura Ingalls Wilder books, which cover the same general time frame that OSV portrays. So this unique museum right here in our own backyard brings this literature to life in such an engaging way that I wonder if every school child in the country shouldn't be required to make the pilgrimage to Sturbridge at some point in their childhood.

What is it about the place? It speaks Americana. It is how we grew our nation into what it is today. OSV demonstrates in a way no static museum can how our forbearers lived - or rather survived. Homes were small, cramped, too hot or too cold and smoky. The simplest of dietary staples like milk and butter required a morning's work. If your vegetable garden failed, instead of griping over the back fence with your neighbor about the bad summer weather, you stood the very real chance of starving. You get the idea.

So when this whole idea of providing tours in Spanish created an outcry, my first instinct was to jump to the museum's defense. I am still in favor of the program, but I figured I would wait for the furor to calm before weighing in.

For whatever reason, this whole episode brought me back to a vacation I took with my family about 10 years ago. We stayed in Paris in a friend's apartment overlooking the Seine. It was awesome. But not being in a hotel provided its challenges.

I had to really work on resurrecting my French. Fortunately, I had grown up around French-Canadians out there in Chicopee. In fact, last time I visited, the neighborhood Catholic Church and associated school still conducted services and lessons in French. So advantage me. However, I also quickly learned that Canadian-French is different from Parisian French. A lot different.

So we got by, but it was challenging. While most Parisians speak English, they like to pretend they don't unless they are in the tourist trade. If you go to the major tourist sites, tours are offered in every major language you can think of. We took a bus trip to Bruges, Belgium and the tour guides repeated everything in English, Spanish and French. There were other buses that offered different languages - Mandarin, Russian, Japanese, Italian, German, Dutch, you name it.

So what is the big deal that OSV would offer tours and materials in Spanish along with English? According to the United Nations, 6 languages - Arabic, Mandarin Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish - are spoken as a primary, secondary or tertiary language by over 3 billion people worldwide; more than half the world's population. So, if I am an organization catering to an international clientele, I suppose I would try to offer information in these 6 languages as a minimum.

Spanish, of course, is widely spoken in the United States. Given that Puerto Rico is a territory of the U.S. and most of our southern neighbors speak Spanish as a primary language (many Brazilians speak Spanish in addition to Portuguese), this makes perfect sense.


According to the U.N. web site, Spanish is the second or third (depending on which data you look at) most commonly used language in the world, behind Mandarin Chinese. The United States, in fact, has more native Spanish speakers than Spain, according to EU figures. And in Massachusetts, nearly 7% of the population speaks Spanish as a first language. Yet, many people seem to have a strong bias against the use of the Spanish language.

Along the northern border of the U.S., signs and services are usually offered in English and French. But for some reason, when we travel to northern Maine, Vermont or Quebec, we find the use of French 'quaint.' When we travel to El Paso or Phoenix or San Diego, the use of Spanish is 'repulsive.'

Back to OSV, offering tours in Spanish makes absolutely perfect sense from a marketing point of view. It also makes perfect sense from a demographic point of view. It also makes perfect sense from a cultural understanding point of view. Isn't it better that a first generation American of Hispanic descent could go to OSV and have the same wonderful experience as my family because they are able to communicate in their native language? Won't that child (or children) gain a better understanding of our heritage and our culture when they are given the opportunity to truly understand what they are experiencing?

I think OSV is doing the right thing. In the past 2 years, OSV management has done a spectacular job returning the struggling museum to a thriving, profitable destination. I have no doubt that this is another well thought out move that will have positive results.

P.S. - It's Goat Island Light near Kennebunk.

 Blogger Profile



A lifelong Massachusetts resident, Jeff LaBonte grew up in Chicopee and attended UMass-Amherst where he earned a bachelor's degree in business administration. He and his wife moved to the Worcester area in 1993. Jeff received an MBA from Clark University in 1997, and now works as an independent financial advisor. Jeff is a member of the Auburn Recreation and Culture Committee and serves as moderator on the Pakachoag Church board. Jeff lives in Auburn with his wife and four children.

