



Guest Frequent Traveler PJJ, Windsor CN: When you visit a foreign country, there's a great advantage if you can speak with the people there. You really don't have to be a great conversationalist in Spanish, French, German or Italian. The basic needs are a dozen words and phrases to get quick directions and other information.

I had two years of high school French studies and a year of Italian in college. They've served me well through the years when I've traveled. More than just book learning, I absorbed the languages in classrooms where many of students were second-generation kids who who spoke them at home. That gave me some of the slang and everyday speech you don't get in language textbooks. Those classmates also taught me curse words and phrases. On several occasions while traveling in France and Italy, I've used them on crooked cabbies and snooty waiters. I'm always pleasantly surprised to see how effective mild curses can be to get honest service and avoid being cheated. I don't recommend it for every traveler, but desperate times often call for desperate means.

We travel to Mexico frequently from our home in Southern California. Additionally, our area of the city has many Spanish-speaking people. We enjoy Mexican food, and frequently dine at local ethnic restaurants. My wife speaks excellent Spanish, and I'm learning new words and phrases, including curses, every day.

We recently sailed on a cruise from San Diego with port visits to Ensenada and Cabo San Lucas on the West Coast of Mexico. When other passengers found out my wife spoke Spanish, they asked us to help in bargaining. We accepted and they paid for lunch at a local restaurant.

We're planning our next overseas journey for the coming season, and it will probably take us to Hong Kong, Shanghai, Singapore or Beijing. We don't expect to be speaking fluent Chinese by then, but we'll take along a miraculous little electronic, hand-held helper we'd never have dreamed of in our travels a decade or so ago.

It's called a Global Talking Translator for 12 Languages, and sells for the unbelievable bargain

price of \$40. It not only instantly gives you the right words and phrases on the screen, but a voice also tells you how to pronounce them.

We were very happy to get the electronic helper, but it had one little disappointment. None of the words or phrases were curses, and we wanted to be prepared to use them if we encountered crooked cabbies and rude waiters on the Asian side of the world. Ref: www.shoptronics.com