

EXPAT

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On Fireworks Abroad

by [Lucas Laursen](#)

My friends and I are still learning to be expats. We have it easy, though, because plenty of people have documented what expats do best: hang out with each other.

We learn from the 1920s Paris set of American writers that it's glamorous to adopt a few foreign mannerisms and display them to each other. I haven't taken up smoking, because that's vilified even in Europe now, but I finally had my first cup of coffee ever in Rome this week. I'd call it espresso in the States, but here they simply call it *caffè*. I can't wait to get back to Cambridge to moan about how lousy English coffee is by comparison. Of course I won't bother to wait until I've tried English coffee. What'd be the point?



My college buddy Jon will tell me about the fortunes of his football team, and I'll nod, gravely glad that we're calling the sport by the same name everyone except American soccer fans use. Odds are this will take place at a gathering of Americans.

In fact, the recent spate of festivities has throw into sharp relief some American reactions to living abroad. At Halloween, Jon hosted a party at which we instructed our British friends in pumpkin-carving. At Guy Fawkes Day, a couple of us Americans soberly agreed that the Brits just can't match our fireworks. Best of all was the election: Brits and Americans alike held late-night election watches. Separate but equal, I'm sure.

I doubt I'm the first person to whinge (sigh, that's British for whine) about people clustering together while abroad. Most of my American friends in Cambridge are even so self-aware as to comment sadly on the phenomenon.

I guess none of this is puzzling. It's just the easiest way out, especially on arrival. The natural alternatives require more effort: some of my American friends have joined choirs or teams and have moved from awkward departmental welcome drinks to weekly drinks at the pub with their colleagues. Bonding will take time, as I learned when it took my reserved English housemate three weeks to ask what I did for a living. He didn't invite me for a welcome drink, but I'm holding out for a goodbye drink before I move on.

In the meantime, my first Thanksgiving abroad is coming up, but don't worry about me. I'm having dinner with an American.