

When visitors to the United States underestimate the size of the country

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A friend of mine who is from Lebanon (but now lives in Seattle) invited his grandmother to come visit for the summer. When she arrived, he asked her, “Grandma, is there anywhere in particular you would like to visit?” His grandmother replied, “I’d like go to to Washington, DC.” “Okay, Grandma. Let me buy some plane tickets.” “No, let’s drive.” “You want to drive all the way to Washington, DC? Here, let me show you on a map how far away it is.” Grandma replied, “Let’s do it.” My friend said, “Okay, Grandma, we’re going on a road trip!” He got the rest of the family on board with the plan, packed up the car, and set out early one morning for their cross-country trip. By the end of the day, they had made it as far as Idaho, where they stopped for the night. I assume that they made plenty of stops along the way because (1) part of the point of a road trip is to enjoy the things along the way, and (2) Grandma. Grandma asked, “Is this Washington, DC?” “No, Grandma. Washington, DC is still very far away. Here, let me show you on the map where we are.” Grandma was unconvinced. “If you’d only stop and ask for directions, we would have been there by now.” Grandma was certain that the only reason they were driving all day was that her grandson was lost and stupidly driving in circles, and if he only had driven in the right direction, they’d be there by now. Grandma’s reference for distance was Lebanon, which is a relatively small country. You can drive from the northern tip of the country to the southern tip in a day. The United States is a bit bigger than that. A related story was when my parents in New Jersey hosted some friends from Japan. The first excursion they took was to New York City, a convenient train ride away. For their second trip, they said, “How about today we drive to Chicago?” Third story. Please share any funny stories about geographic blindness in your home country.

(This was supposed to be posted on Geography Awareness Week but I messed up.)

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