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No to plantains, yes to Rocky Mountain oysters

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"No" is rarely the most rational of responses. Maybe that's because it's one of the first words many of us ever speak. And rationality is not something for which toddlers are particularly admired. I was traveling in the tropics recently with my family and breakfast was served with fried plantains. By all rights, a fried plantain is something a child should love. It looks exactly like a banana, is fried and develops a sweet caramelized flavor when cooked. What's not to like? But upon offering a bite to my 6-year-old and 3-year-old, they turned up their noses. "No, I don't like plantains." But you've never tried them. I don't like them. You have to try. No. Yes. No. And so on. Eventually, through their imperceptibly opened lips, we got them to take the tiniest of tiny bites, but by this time, their repeated "no's" had so convinced themselves that they would not like plantains that their belief had become their reality.

Despite this failed attempt, our trip overflowed with new experiences and a lot more "yes's" than "no's". It makes me think how much society would benefit if we all got out of our bubbles a little bit more, traveled and see how other people live.

Perhaps you've heard elitists say stuff like this for some time. How only 20 percent of Americans have passports and we don't understand the rest of the world and blah, blah, blah. And while this may be true, perhaps all of us — the 20 percent included — should start with a visit to the next county before we ask 300 million Americans to drop \$100 on a passport and 50 times that on a week-long trip to Moorea.

I've been lucky to visit a lot of places throughout this great state. Yet I still know more about the Mayans than I do about the Crow. I know more about catching bonefish than I do about catching paddlefish. I've been to Sydney, Australia, but never Sidney, Montana — at least not for any longer than it took to gas up on my way through.

And the converse is equally true. I've met plenty of people who base their opinion of Bozeman, the town I've lived in for the past 16 years, on the traffic and visual blight they encounter on their monthly trip from an outlying hamlet to our Costco store.

No matter which side you land on, the proper analogy is that it's hard to know Chicago when your only experience with the place is changing planes at O'Hare. I don't know how we expect to solve some of the problems facing such a vast state as Montana when we've rarely taken the time to visit and listen to the people that live

in the many, many places throughout Big Sky Country that are so different than our own.

Travel has always been one of my greatest passions, but over time I've come to see its potential as much more than just a self-serving pleasure. Done right, it has an ability to preserve the unique character of our respective hometowns while helping make significant contributions to our economy. And it sure is a great way to get the irrational "no's" out of the vocabulary and start seeing how other people do things.

So during this recession, ditch the tickets to Glasgow, Scotland, and try Glasgow, Montana. Or next time you come to Bozeman, ditch the exits on 19th and Seventh and try East Main Street. Don't visit Berkeley, Calif., until you've taken the guided tour of the Berkeley Pit.

Just put yourself out there and see how your neighbors on the other side of the state live. It's all in the attitude. You can be the 2-year-old who always says no. Or you can open wide and find out that like the plantains, getting out of your element can be darn sweet.