

Cultural Sensitivity Booklet



The UNIVERSITY
of NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

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This booklet contains information on the protocols and etiquette that are appropriate when dealing with people from the countries included in the study: China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and Singapore.

In commissioning the project, the University has sought to ensure that as an institution that prides itself on being “international”, we are informed of and sensitive to, the customs and practices of other countries.

The following notes are therefore offered as a guide to those wishing to understand and observe appropriate etiquette and protocols. It should be noted that in many of the cultures examined there is increasing evidence of “westernisation”. Nevertheless, there are behaviours that are culturally appropriate - or inappropriate. Understanding these ensures that you will be more sensitive to your hosts or visitors and more confident about the smaller issues of appropriate manners. Knowing the correct behaviour helps you avoid taboos and demonstrate an appreciation of cultural sensitivities.

The notes provided have been drawn quite significantly from the series “The Simple Guide to Customs and Etiquette in” published by Global Books Ltd, and complemented by reference to university staff from each of the countries.

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The Equity and Diversity Unit

CHINA

1. Introduction

The People's Republic of China consists of some 50 or more ethnic sub groups. The majority - over 91% - are Han people, descendents of the Han Chinese region on which the Chinese Empire was originally based. But there are 55 other ethnic groups. Despite this enormous ethnic variety, a sense of cultural unity has prevailed over the centuries due perhaps largely to the readiness of different ethnic groups to adopt the Chinese language or Confucian systems of belief.

2. Background - the Influence of History /Geography

After a history spanning more than 5000 years, the 19th and 20th centuries brought foreign influence and remarkable change to China. The turmoil evident in the overthrow of the last of the imperial dynasties in 1911, continued in the conflict between nationalist and communist forces during the 20th century culminating in the victory of the Communists in 1949. In that year the People's Republic of China was established.

In its principal cities, China is highly westernised. Geoffrey Murray warns foreign visitors travelling to Beijing and other major cities expecting to find "narrow alleyways and straw-hatted coolies", that they will find instead "broad, traffic-jammed avenues lined with shops that would fit comfortably into London's Regent Street or New York's Fifth Avenue" (1999, p9). However beneath the patina of modernity, much of China is still rural without all "mod cons". But China is changing at a remarkable pace. As the country welcomes the news that it will host the Olympic Games in the year 2008, it is possible that even greater signs of change will appear.

China is also greatly influenced by the vastness of its size and the nature of its terrain. The presence of broad rivers and mountain ranges divides the country and isolates sections and communities. One consequence is the continued existence of numerous dialects unfamiliar and unintelligible to many - including interpreters. Seventy percent of the people however speak Mandarin, and this is usually the language that interpreters will be familiar with.

3. Communicating

Greetings

It is customary when meeting someone in China, to shake hands and to nod respectfully. Note that the Chinese handshake is likely to continue for a much longer time than is usual in the West.

If you are being introduced to a group of people it is important to ensure that you shake the hand of each member of the group. You should always begin with the senior-most member if you know who that is, and work your way down the hierarchy.

It is not appropriate to touch members of the opposite sex after the initial handshake.

Titles

Chinese people are generally more formal than Westerners. The appropriate way of addressing the Chinese is to use Mr, Mrs, Miss plus the person's surname. In China the surname precedes the personal name - a reflection of the greater importance attached to the family over the individual. Thus, Zhang Hua will be called Mr Zhang.

Chinese may also be referred to by their job-title e.g. Manager Li, or Foreman Xia. This is a direct translation of the words the Chinese use to refer to one another in Chinese. It is useful in that it distinguishes individuals who share the same surname.

Names

Most Chinese surnames consist of one syllable, the most common being Zhang, Wang, Wu, and Li. Personal names can be either one or two syllables and are often chosen according to a pre-arranged plan to which the family has adhered for generations.

With the increasing influence of Western practices some Chinese are choosing Western names, and are reversing the order away from the traditional surname first, followed by personal names. This may make it difficult for the visitor, particularly where you come across a name that consists of two words of one syllable, e.g. Jing Wang. In this instance it is appropriate to check whether the person's name is Mr/s Jing or Mr/s Wang.

Language

The amount of English understood by Chinese people varies very considerably. Even those who have studied English will not have had much practice in speaking it. The following advice should be heeded:

- Speak carefully and slightly more slowly than you would usually. Speak simply and avoid unusual words and slang expressions. Be prepared to rephrase your message rather than simply repeat it. Be patient, and ensure that you do not raise your voice.
- If you are using an interpreter, avoid saying too much at a time. Allow the interpreter a chance to translate your message in manageable slices. At the same time maintain some eye contact with the person you are speaking to rather than with the interpreter. Granted the sensitivity of the Chinese to the notion of "staring", you should avoid uninterrupted eye contact.
- Despite a reputation for speaking rather obliquely, the Chinese today often appear more direct than Westerners. While they are courteous, do not be surprised if they ask you about your age, marital status or salary - questions they will not be affronted by if you ask them. At the same time, Chinese are quite reserved on matters of sexuality and would be affronted by questions on this topic.

Conversation

In terms of conversation topics, you need to be conscious that the Chinese experienced severe difficulties in the hands of the Japanese during WWII; deeply resent the role of the British in the Opium Wars; and are defensive of China's place in the "emancipation" of Tibet. In general it is advisable to avoid internal politics and to ensure that you do not criticise leaders.

References to China

You should refer to 'China' or the 'People's Republic of China'. Mention of the Republic of China, which is what the Taiwan authorities call their regime, may cause confusion or give offence. The Chinese regard Taiwan as part of China - if you refer to Taiwan, simply call it 'Taiwan'.

4. Social Behaviour

While Chinese do not expect Western visitors to understand and comply with the Chinese way of doing things, it is nevertheless helpful to understand what Chinese people expect of themselves and their colleagues, and emulate this where possible.

Red Tape

There is an enormous amount of “red tape” to be managed in China, e.g. when exchanging currency or buying a plane ticket. It is important that as a visitor you realise that this demands time and that you accept the inconvenience gracefully. An impatient Westerner will be seen as undignified and will “lose face”.

“Face”

It is important to the Chinese that people are not seen to “lose face”. A foreigner can lose face by losing patience, or becoming angry or upset. Impatience is seen by the Chinese as a serious flaw.

On the other hand, concern with avoiding loss of face is probably responsible for a number of behaviours in the Chinese that may be misunderstood. Laughter, for example, will not always mean that the person concerned is amused by a situation. It may be a means of hiding embarrassment, or covering up ignorance or lack of understanding. It is important that the foreign visitor appreciate the Chinese concern with “losing face”, and learn to understand the meaning of non-verbal messages.

Negotiating with People of the Opposite Sex

If you are dealing with someone from the opposite sex there should be little physical contact after the initial handshake. When members of the same sex are dealing with each other, there is much more likelihood of touching. Women frequently emphasise a point by patting the other on the arm. This is quite common, but does not signify a homosexual relationship.

Women Visitors

In theory, there are equal opportunities for men and women in all occupations in China, and the Chinese are quite happy to deal with women either as business associates or visitors.

Women visiting China on business report that they are well received by their male Chinese counterparts. Interestingly, it is not considered strange if women visitors reciprocate toasts at banquets etc. Nevertheless, when male business people visit China and are invited to an after work function, their wives are not necessarily included. In either case an invitation to you may not include an invitation to your partner, so you should check before attending a function.

Chinese Behaviour

The visitor to China needs to recognise that a number of practices regarded as inappropriate in the West, are not seen as rude or unrefined in China.

- Chinese may spit quite freely onto the pavement. While this practice has been challenged on the grounds of hygiene, it is still commonplace.
- A second practice regarded as quite acceptable to the Chinese is belching, particularly after a meal when it may be interpreted as indicating a sense of well-being and is considered to convey appreciation of a good meal. Likewise, a table cloth covered with spills and stains after a meal is deemed to indicate enjoyment of the meal.

5. Gift-Giving

Westerners who are visiting Chinese homes should follow the practice of the Chinese when they visit the West bringing small typically Chinese presents for their hosts. Suitable gifts include those that are representative of the country or company such as: company pens or ties, or small items such as a piece of Wedgewood. Good whiskey or brandy is appropriate, as are foreign cigarettes. However, the Chinese tend not to like sweets or chocolates, and do not appreciate flowers.

After returning home it is a thoughtful gesture to send small gifts to Chinese hosts at Christmas or New Year. Calendars or cards from you on those occasions are thoughtful and will be appreciated.

Taboos

Generally, Chinese people are quite superstitious and will find particular gifts very inappropriate. While that attitude is declining, it is worth noting that those who are superstitious will want you to avoid gifts such as a clock as a present. The words for "to give a clock" are the same as the words for "to take someone to their death". Clocks are also a reminder of the passage of time and are not seen as fortunate.

Never offer sharp instruments such as knives or letter openers as gifts. With their association with severing or cutting, they are regarded as bad luck. When Chinese give each other anything sharp, the recipient returns a small coin symbolising good fortune and the fending off of bad luck.

Handkerchiefs are not good gifts as they symbolise the wiping of tears of sorrow.

6. Business Etiquette

Business Cards

Business cards are widely used. If possible have a Chinese version of your name and position within your company on the back. Keep your name to two or three syllables - anything longer could be difficult for the Chinese to manage.

At a business meeting the first thing that happens is an exchange of business cards. You should always present and receive cards with both hands. When handed a card you should read it carefully, not merely glance at it. Some people find it useful to keep the card on the table in front of them to remind them of their Chinese colleagues' names. Alternatively place it with appropriate care / respect in your wallet or card holder.

Observing Rank

The Chinese are status-conscious, so it is important to respect this. When a group of Chinese enter a room, they will do so in order of seniority. Make sure you shake the hand of each member of the group - not just the leaders. Note that in China no special precedence is given to women.

Saying "No"

In business and other contexts, a Chinese person may not like to say "no", believing that a direct "no" would be embarrassing to both parties. The Chinese will try to find a way that is more diplomatic, tactful and considerate. As a result he/she may disagree indirectly, for example by avoiding the question or remaining silent. Sometimes however, the apparent stalling by the Chinese may simply mean that he/she has to consult a superior, or that concessions are needed.

Visitors need to be sensitive to these behaviours, to learn to interpret signals, to be aware of the loss of face the Chinese person will feel if forced to say “no”, and to be prepared to respect their position.

Manner

In negotiating with the Chinese avoid appearing superior or behaving in a way that is patronising. The Chinese are both knowledgeable and proud of their heritage.

Punctuality

Punctuality is considered very important in China. It is the norm for business appointments and social occasions. You will not be kept waiting and should not keep others waiting. Programs for visitors are often very tight and even the smallest delays can upset arrangements. At the same time, you should avoid checking your watch and giving the impression that you are in a hurry.

Wives / Partners

While most business entertaining is done in restaurants, spouses are not usually included. Unless specifically included in the invitation, the wives or husbands of western visitors should not attend.

7. Business Tips

Carolyn Mason and Geoffrey Murray (1999, p52) offer the following 10 business tips. They clearly have relevance for all those relating to and negotiating with Chinese people.

- Be patient, contract negotiations are often time-consuming, not only because of the way Chinese decide, but because they may wish to test your resolve; some may take years to negotiate.
- Do not be too legalistic - contracts don't have the same binding connotations that they have in the West. Once the contract is signed, the parties are regarded as “friends”, free therefore to ask favours of each other. (It is not unusual for the Chinese to request changes to a contract after it has been signed.)
- Emphasise long term commitment - Chinese value a long relationship of mutual friendship and trust over one-off deals.
- Show respect - Chinese are proud of their cultural heritage and do not appreciate a condescending superior attitude in Western colleagues.
- Do not be apologetic. Be aware that the Chinese may raise issues / events in order to shame you and gain the upper hand. If these events have no relevance, don't be apologetic.
- Do not try to be too Chinese - this is the preserve of the Chinese.
- Do not expect instant results - some Sino-foreign ventures that are successful today, sustained significant losses before achieving success.
- Keep expectations under control - the market may be huge, and the Chinese extravagant in their picture of future prospects, but be cautious.
- Learn to read body language. Chinese can be less than direct in their speech - “maybe” may in fact mean “definitely not”. Take time to understand the significance of non-verbal communication.

8. Dress

Business dress should be quite formal - suits and ties for men generally, though in hot weather some business men wear safari-suits. Women are free to wear trousers as many Chinese women do, but skirts or suits are seen as smarter.

In general, women should dress modestly - plunging necklines and short hemlines should be avoided. It is also desirable that they avoid loud or flashy behaviour which draws attention to themselves. Such behaviour is not appreciated in men or women.

9. Dining

Home Visits

The Chinese are extremely hospitable and - unlike the Japanese who tend to entertain in public places - are quite happy in the increasingly open political climate to invite visitors to their homes. They may well ask others - neighbours, relatives, friends - to drop in, particularly if the neighbour/friend/relative is proficient in English.

Banquets

Banquets are a regular feature of life for the visiting business person especially if there is a group of visitors. They can consist of up to 12 courses, so be prepared. If rice is served it is often at the end of the meal as a "filler"; it is appropriate to leave some rice in your bowl to indicate that you do not need anything more.

Seating

The Chinese host will usually sit facing the door and place the most eminent guest to his right. The deputy host will sit on the opposite side with the second most senior visitor at his right. If there is an interpreter he/she will be seated to the right of the most important guest. The remaining hosts and guests will sit alternately around the table.

Table Manners

It is normal to find you are only given chopsticks for eating implements. It may therefore be useful to practise using these. Watch what the Chinese do when they serve themselves from the communal dishes.

It is common practice for the host to place tasty morsels on the plate of the visitor - a way of honouring the guest. Always wait to be urged to eat before helping yourself. Of course you should not put food on your host's plate - you are the guest not the host.

If you have a piece of bone or gristle in your mouth, don't use your fingers to remove it; use the porcelain spoon or your chopsticks, or follow the Chinese way of spitting it out. Rice is eaten by lifting the bowl to the mouth and pushing the grains into the mouth with the chopsticks. A bowl of soup is similarly raised to the lips.

Speeches and toasts are usually made early in the meal - the host speaking probably between the first and second courses, and the chief guest replying early in the second course. You should be brief, expressing appreciation, looking towards future cooperation etc. Avoid elaborate jokes which die in the translation.

Towels - hot and damp, or icy cold and damp - may be offered before or after a meal. They are to wipe hands, though men may choose to wipe their face.

Be gracious and engage in conversation with your Chinese colleagues throughout the meal, rather than simply speaking to your Western colleagues.

Be ready to arrange a return banquet(s) for your hosts and remember it is your responsibility to arrange the seating, provide place cards, and act as an appropriate host urging your guests to eat. They may well decline several times before they feel able to accept, so you need to keep pressing them.

Alcohol and Tea

Alcohol is an important part of a Chinese banquet and formal meal. The consumption of large amounts of alcohol is being officially discouraged. The Chinese equivalent of "Cheers" is ganbei (literally dry glasses). Be aware that there may be more than one toast.

Green tea is widely drunk at meetings and at work rather than at formal meals. The 1990s has seen the re-emergence of tea-houses - now that there is more leisure time and a five day week. When you enter a tea-house and are seated, a girl in traditional Chinese dress will arrive at the table carrying a tray with a tea set. She introduces the visitor to the right procedure of drinking tea.

Departing after Dinner

The Chinese do not linger once a meal is over. The meal may take some time, but once it is over, visitors may chat for a few minutes but should then get up and leave. Departure soon after the meal is the rule.

10. Conclusion

The vastness of China's size and population mean that there is still great variety within China, and significant differences in practice and custom as you move from the city to the country. Sensitivity, a respect for Chinese culture, and a willingness to take time to learn both about and from your Chinese colleagues will ensure that you interact in a way that is both appropriate and professional.

Reference

Mason, Caroline and Murray, Geoffrey Simple Guide to China - Customs and Etiquette Global Books Ltd England 3rd Edition 1999

INDIA

1. Introduction

India in the early 21st century is a complex and intriguing country of contrasting languages, customs and attitudes. Despite the diversity that successive waves of immigration have created over the centuries, India has “an underlying cultural unity” which allows the visitor to identify the culture and customs of India and to appreciate the etiquette expected of the visitor.

2. Background

India has a population of over 980 million comprising more than 100 different ethnic sub groups. Around 70% of Indians live in rural areas, though yearly migration towards cities is around 200,000.

Despite the ethnic diversity and the sheer size of India's population, the country has remained a stable democracy since 1947 when it achieved independence. It is a secular state which contains Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists and others, but Hindus constitute about 83% of the population.

While the influence of Hinduism is apparent in the customs and etiquette of the Indian people, there is a very widespread awareness of Western ways and etiquette. For the visitor, this recognition of their way of doing things will make interaction easier. Nevertheless, efforts made by the Western visitor to respect and practise courtesies expected of Indian people will be appreciated.

3. Communicating

Language

Throughout India a range of dialects is spoken. Hindi is the national language, used widely in the north, though not so extensively in the south. English is the official language of business.

Greeting

Indians generally greet each other and say goodbye with palms together and fingers pointing upwards as if saying prayers, and say namaste - which means ‘I recognise the self in you’. Muslims say: Salaam aleikum - ‘peace be upon you’.

Business associates will shake the hand of foreign colleagues, though less forcefully than some Westerners. It is quite appropriate for the visitor to greet an Indian colleague with a handshake or in the traditional Indian way. The latter indicates an appreciation of Indian custom.

When greeting women colleagues it is not appropriate to offer to shake hands unless the woman first offers her hand. Where she does not, it is appropriate to say namaste as you hold your palms together in the Indian manner of greeting. Such a gesture will be appreciated.

Names / Titles

Different Indian groups have different systems of naming. In some parts of India (particularly in Southern India) people do not have surnames as such. The name given to them by their family becomes the name by which they are called in business as well as in private life.

Some groups from the south have a particular way of naming children. In their system a name

such as R V Ramamurthy would consist of a personal name - Ramamurthy, and the initials of Ramamurthy's ancestral village and of his father.

Others are known by a name that comprises their own name, their father's name, and his father's name.

Among some Hindus the personal name of the infant will be decided after consultation with a priest who considers the date/time and other details of the child's birth before recommending appropriate syllables for the parents to use in choosing a name.

Some groups derive their names from their occupations e.g. Mr Doctor or Mr Mistry (mechanic). The Indian form of Mr and Mrs is Shri and Shrimati.

Where there is doubt about the appropriate name to use, check with an Indian colleague or friend.

Sikh names are readily recognised. Singh indicates a man and is placed after the personal name e.g. Ranjit Singh. The indicator of a female is Kaur which is added to a personal name as in Amarjit Kaur. A married woman uses her own name not her husband's.

Respect for elders and seniors is important in India. In conversation, for example, the polite form of address 'thou' - 'aap' - is reserved for elders, seniors or upper castes. Servants and children are addressed as 'you' - 'tum'. Similarly, attaching 'ji' to any name as for example in Gandhiji is a mark of respect.

For the foreign visitor the important thing to understand is that they should address an Indian colleague by his / her first name preceded by their title e.g. Dr Siva, rather than Dr Siva Muthaly, where Muthaly is the name (personal name) of Siva's father.

It is also important that the visitor retain the use of the title of the person e.g. Dr or Mr or Mrs, until the relationship is longstanding and friendly and less formality is acceptable.

4. Indian Behaviour

Bodily Contact

Bodily contact between men and women is considered provocative and inappropriate in India. According to Kingsland, it is likely to attract disrespect in most parts of the country.

It is equally unacceptable for Indian women to be touched by any male other than their husband or child, and then by the husband only in private. The visitor who is aware of this, will not touch an Indian woman or initiate a handshake unless the Indian woman offers her hand first.

It is common to see men holding hands, including those of foreign colleagues. Holding a visitor's hand is a way of creating a bond with the other, including the visitor.

Indian Hospitality

Indians are warm and hospitable people and very friendly to foreign visitors. Often Indian colleagues will press the visitor to share a meal. Not to issue the invitation would be seen as discourteous. However, the invitation may not in fact be seriously meant - it is primarily an act of courtesy. It is likely that the appropriate response from the visitor will be to decline the invitation, unless it is a genuine invitation. The invitation is genuine if it is formally arranged (for example in a restaurant), or is a special occasion (for example a wedding), or if the host repeatedly insists on the visitor accepting the invitation. The visitor therefore needs to understand the Indian notion of courtesy in offering the invitation, and must look for other signs to check whether the colleague issuing the invitation is doing so in the expectation that it will be accepted.

According to Kingsland, even strangers might ask you on meeting you, to visit them at their home. They will persist until you agree, but will be very surprised if you turn up.

Conversation Taboos

Sex and homosexuality are not subjects that are discussed openly.

A traditional Indian wife will not say her husband's name aloud as it is considered to be disrespectful. However, this is not common in cities or educated circles.

5. Gift-Giving

There is no tradition of taking presents if you are invited to visit an Indian family, but a gift from the visitor's own country will be appreciated, particularly one that reflects thoughtfulness. Some would suggest that the best gift you can take a business partner is a bottle of Scotch whiskey, although not if the colleague is Muslim, or if the host is a teetotaler, which is not uncommon in India.

It would be most inappropriate to take a bottle of wine or item of food that you obtained locally. The implication is that your host will not offer, or is incapable of offering you, sufficient drink or food.

If you are staying with an Indian family it is appropriate to invite them out for a meal at a good restaurant.

6. Business Etiquette

While India's legal and business framework owes much to its origins under British imperial rule, in some ways it is very different from the West. The majority of corporations and enterprises are either family-owned or controlled. (Kingsland) The foreign visitor needs to understand the strength of these connections.

Meeting Business Acquaintances

When meeting business acquaintances for the first time it is respectful to acknowledge the most senior person first. The status of the most senior person will be clear in the behaviour of the rest of the group towards him or her.

Business Cards

Business cards are used extensively in India. Because English is the common language of business, business cards should be printed in English. Your business card should list your qualifications clearly. While courtesy dictates that you offer and receive business cards with appropriate deference, there is not the same ritual attached to the exchange of business cards that you would find in Korea or Japan.

Punctuality / Time

It is important that visitors who have an official appointment turn up on time. They may, however, have to wait for the person they are meeting. While your own punctuality will indicate the importance you attach to the occasion, punctuality is not widely observed by Indian business and professional people.

(Note: If you have been invited to a social occasion, you should double check with your host, but recognise that almost everyone will turn up an hour late.)

Women

Indian women are to be found at every level of business, and there is no issue for businesswomen visiting India. Nevertheless, as in most countries, care should be taken when moving around after dark. Harassment may be encountered, particularly by women whose dress is revealing.

Taboos

While Indian women are evident in business, visiting business women should be aware that inviting a male colleague to their hotel room at night is likely to be misconstrued.

7. Dress

India is quite conservative in dress. Appropriate business attire for men is a business suit with tie, though Indian business leaders may wear a suit without a tie. For women, the important rule is to ensure that they minimise the amount of flesh that is exposed. Short skirts are entirely unsuitable. Kingsland suggests that women consider adopting the popular salwar and kameez, the local baggy long trousers and shirt. These are very comfortable and inexpensive, and available in beautiful materials and designs.

8. Dining

Indians love sharing a meal and entertaining and will arrange for their visitors to enjoy such experiences.

Dining Out

When invited out, the meal is likely to be in a British-style club or a restaurant and the fare will be similar to that in the West. In this setting (as at any formal meal) you will be offered traditional western cutlery. Feel free to use this. When you are eating out and ordering food, make sure you make known your tolerance levels for chilli and spices.

Dining in an Indian Home

If invited to an Indian home, you will be expected to join the family around the dining table. As a foreigner you may be offered a fork but most people will eat with their fingers. If you choose to use your hand remember never to eat with your left hand, or to pass with your left hand. If asked to pass the salt never place the salt in the hand of the person asking for it; it is considered bad luck. You will find that in traditional families the guests and men are served first, and the women eat afterwards.

Washing Hands

It is important that if you choose to eat with your fingers, you first wash your hand. In a family home you may use the wash basin, otherwise you will be offered a small bowl of water.

Serving

Traditionally there will be a wide array of dishes offered, sometimes as many as 30. You may help yourself or be served with a small amount of the numerous dishes as well as some form of bread. A small piece of the bread is torn off and used to scoop up the vegetable or curry.

Tea

Tea is offered at all times and everywhere you go in India.

Water

Indians usually drink water with their meals. You may be offered nimboo pani - fresh made lemonade, or lassi - a yoghurt drink. Indian beer is excellent and so is the rum. In general while visiting India you should not drink water unless you know it has been boiled and filtered, or bottled. The same rules should apply for ice and the water used for brushing teeth. There is plenty of bottled mineral water available.

Tipping

In India you tip to get things done, rather than to acknowledge good service.

9. Conclusion

In India, as in any country you visit, courtesy should prevail. While many Indians within the cities will be conversant with Western ways, they will appreciate sensitivity on the part of their Western colleagues to the etiquette of their country. Respect and sensitivity are indispensable.

Reference

Kingsland, Venika Simple Guide to India Customs and Etiquette 2nd edition Global Books Ltd England 1999

JAPAN

1. Introduction

Japanese society tends to value formality - a characteristic that emerges not only in the formal tea ceremonies that many are familiar with, but in the formal expressions Japanese people use for particular occasions, and their attention to appropriate body language.

2. Communicating

The appropriate greeting in Japan is either the bow or, more recently, a handshake.

Bowing

Bowing is the most important of all Japanese forms of non-verbal communication. It is both an expression of respect for others and of personal humility. It is also used as a greeting and to express gratitude.

When bowing, keep the feet together, the back straight, and the hands at the side. Avoid being overly casual with a mere nod of the head, or unknowingly rude by making an exaggeratedly deep bow.

In dealing with sales staff in department stores, or with waiters and cashiers, the customer merely nods in acknowledgement.

Bowing is still the accepted greeting between Japanese women.

Shaking Hands

Japanese men have adopted the practice of shaking hands when greeting non-Japanese, often with a light grip and an accompanying nod of the head. Some men even use the firm grip and direct eye contact of the West. In general, however, when you shake hands, avoid gripping unnecessarily firmly, coming too close to the other person, and backslapping. Japanese women may not extend their hand to shake. It is appropriate, in that instance, to acknowledge the woman by bowing.

Introductions

Japanese family names precede personal names for example Takahashi Yuriko becomes Ms Yuriko Takahashi in the Anglicised mode. It is not appropriate to use names in conversation; to do so is seen as too intimate.

In day-to-day relationships, Japanese call one another by their family names, no matter how long they have known one another.

There are times when you should use a person's title or position name rather than the family name. Medical doctors and teachers of whatever rank are called sensei. If a man named Tanaka is a tea-ceremony instructor or university professor you should call him sensei or Tanaka sensei. Omission of the personal name is seen as respectful.

In the business world, you will also hear the titles shacho (president of a company), bucho (department head), kacho (section head) and kakaricho (head clerk). These titles are used without '-san' by those within the company. Those external to the company will use the title plus san.

Conversation and Body Language

Speaking clearly is polite, but speaking very slowly in a loud voice is condescending. As in any culture, such an approach is seen as bad manners.

When conversing, avoid any of the following which are also regarded as bad manners:

- leaving one's hands in one's pockets,
- standing with one leg crossed over the other,
- leaning against a wall or door, or
- chewing gum.

When seated, crossing the ankle over the-knee cross is considered too informal. Similarly, sticking one's legs out in front either in a chair or on tatami, is seen as inappropriate.

When seated on a sofa, show respect by sitting forward on the edge, and not leaning back. When sitting on tatami, initially sit on your legs (out of politeness), and then shift to the less formal cross-legged position. Women will start by sitting on their legs, then may later tuck their legs to one side. It would be most improper for a woman to sit cross-legged.

Japanese Behaviours

Japanese people regard it as most impolite to blow one's nose in public. When unavoidable, the nose is blown (quietly) using paper tissues which are then discarded. The handkerchief is for wiping the mouth, removing perspiration from the face, or wiping one's hands when leaving a washroom.

Excessive gesturing, displays of displeasure, and loud speech are also considered extremely discourteous by Japanese people.

Japanese people may not shake the head to indicate 'no', but may instead, hold the hand flat in front of their face and wave it back and forth. This gesture can also indicate disagreement, denial, lack of understanding, or humility in response to a compliment.

The Japanese language generally requires frequent use of rejoinders - words or sounds that indicate the listener is following the speaker. It is a mistake to assume that hai (usually understood as 'yes') means agreement. In many contexts, all it means is that the listener is paying attention to what the speaker is saying.

Japanese people tend not to express affection in public. Young people may walk arm in arm, and occasionally kiss in public, but this is considered improper.

Japanese smile to communicate a range of emotions: anger, happiness, confusion, embarrassment, sadness and disappointment. The visitor who is willing to be sensitive, can generally discern the emotion behind the smile.

The tendency to be self-effacing and humble is well ingrained in Japanese and accounts for the practice of referring to wives or children as "stupid". When a Japanese colleague refers to his wife or son as "stupid" he does not necessarily mean that they are stupid. He is simply displaying appropriate humility.

The gesture that signifies oneself is a forefinger pointed to one's nose. It is impolite to point to others. One may indicate others with the hand palm up and fingers together in the direction of the person being referred to.

If a Japanese colleague gestures with a thumb and forefinger holding an imaginary sake cup and tossing it back, you may assume that you are being invited to go drinking. This is a reasonably colloquial way of communicating.

It is considered polite to suppress emotions in public. This practice no doubt accounts for the tendency for men and women not to laugh out loud.

3. Business / Professional Etiquette

Appointments

Japanese society depends heavily on connections and it is often difficult to obtain an appointment simply by telephoning and asking to meet with the person in charge. Your chance of success will be much greater if you can arrange an introduction through someone who is already connected with the person you wish to meet.

The visitor is advised to recognise that it takes time to create these contacts and to build up a network of relationships.

Punctuality

Ensure that you are punctual for appointments. If you will be delayed, telephone ahead and apologise for the delay. Visitors to Japan will find that all Japanese, trades people included, will be punctual.

Identifying Yourself

If you are visiting an office for the first time, introduce yourself verbally to the receptionist and present a name card. If you are shown into a waiting room or conference area, sit closest to the door and make no attempt to unpack your belongings. When the person appears, stand and make formal introductions and greetings, then wait until invited to have a seat.

Name / Business Cards

It is courteous at an initial meeting, to present a business card. If possible, this should have one side of the card printed in English and the other side in Japanese. However, having a card printed in English only is better than nothing. A business card will inform the receiver of the rank of the visitor - information that is important to the Japanese and will influence the style of interaction.

The proper manner for exchanging cards is to turn the card so that the other person can read the Japanese side as you hand it to her / him. Hold the card grasped between the thumb and index finger of the right hand, extend it towards the other person, and simultaneously bow as you introduce yourself verbally. To be very polite, hold the top corners of the card between the thumb and forefinger of both hands.

Bow slightly as you receive the other person's card between your thumb and forefinger. Read the card carefully. It is acceptable to confirm verbally how to pronounce the other person's name. Once you have grasped the person's name, position and organisation, bow once more in accordance with the degree of deference you think appropriate. It is acceptable then either to slip the card into your card holder or to place it on the table in front of you and leave it there during the conversation.

Conversational Considerations

If the two parties in conversation are equally fluent in Japanese and English, it is customary to use the language of the person higher in rank. Where there is no difference in status, courtesy suggests you use the other person's first language. In business, it is common sense to use the language of the client. Where some members of the group are not bilingual, try to avoid leaving anyone entirely out of the conversation.

When you rely on English, be conscious that you are asking the other person to carry more weight in a conversation. Assist them by speaking a bit more slowly, more concisely and more clearly than you would normally, and by avoiding idiomatic expressions, slang and colloquialisms.

Good listeners are especially appreciated in Japan, so don't be too talkative and don't interrupt or finish another person's sentence. Do, however, indicate at intervals that you are interested in what the other person is saying by nodding your head and using affirmative sounds equivalent to uh-huh, hmm, or I see in English.

Japanese Style

Westerners sometimes find that Japanese staff appear 'stiff' - a factor of the formality valued by the Japanese. Similarly, Japanese will engage in preliminary conversations that may appear to the visitor to slow down the discussion and delay decisions. Events appear to unfurl very slowly. It is important to understand that the Japanese value this conversation as an opportunity for both sides to learn about each other, and therefore regard it as a valuable preface to decision making. There are no instant decisions. A person who is pushy and demanding will find this slowness exasperating and will probably do poorly in Japanese circles. A person who is prepared to join in the wining and dining and participate in slow conversations will have the opportunity to invest in long term relationships, and is more likely to succeed.

On occasions a Japanese person may become more direct or aggressive when using English, thinking that this is the custom of English speakers. Others may seem excessively polite and self-effacing - a characteristic valued by the Japanese. The Westerner should recognise that this may be a factor of their Japanese colleague's interpretation of what is required, and avoid misunderstanding these people.

4. Gift-Giving

It is polite to bring gifts to people whom you already know or whom you are planning to meet for the first time.

Select something of good quality, avoiding things that have been produced in Japan. Take time to wrap the gift nicely - however simple the gift might be, it will always appear more thoughtful if it is nicely wrapped.

When one gives or receives a gift, it is considered humble and appreciative to use both hands. Both parties should also make an appropriate bow. Gifts are to be accepted and then placed to one side. Unless one is specifically urged to open the gift right then and there, it is polite to wait until later and open it in private.

5. Dining

If one is offered food or drink one says *Itadakimasu*, an expression of gratitude to the person for what is presented.

If you are eating with someone, wait until everyone is served, then say *itadakimasu*. If each person is paying for his/her meal, say *Gochisosama deshita* at the register. If someone else is paying, wait until beyond the register or outside the door and say *Gochisosama deshita* to the person who paid.

Chopsticks

Pick up the chopsticks with one hand, then use both hands to align them. Between bites, place chopsticks on the chopstick rest (*hashi-oki*), if there is one on the table. One may also place them on the edge of the plate so that the ends which touch the food do not touch the plate.

Generally, Japanese food is served on individual plates for each person, but if you need to take something from a common plate, it is proper to reverse the chopsticks and pick up the item with the opposite ends. When you have finished your meal, slip the chopsticks back into the sleeve and fold over one end of the sleeve, or place them on the rest.

Table Manners

When eating in a restaurant or a home, a casual meal will probably consist of several dishes carefully arranged. It is acceptable to move one dish at a time to make it easier to eat.

Pick up bowls, dishes and saucers when eating from them to avoid spilling food. Do not hold a bowl for a long time between bites.

When you are eating *nigiri-zushi* (bite sized pieces of sushi), it is acceptable to use your fingers.

Tea and soup are served hot. Rather than blowing on the food, Japanese make a slurping sound when drinking in order to cool the liquid. Avoid exaggerating the slurping sound.

When offered a cup of green tea, remove the lid (if there is one) and place it so that it does not leave moisture on the table.

If there is a napkin, it is not for placing on the lap or for wiping the mouth. It is merely to keep eating utensils from directly touching the plate. Use your handkerchief for wiping your mouth. At the end of the meal, if you must use a toothpick, at least cover your mouth with your free hand.

Conversation

Japanese tend to be less talkative when eating. As in Western countries, it is considered improper to talk with food in one's mouth.

Drinking

If alcohol is served at a party, the event will officially begin with a toast by the senior member or an honoured guest. Raise one's glass or cup and say *kampai*. People sometimes click glasses together. It is perfectly acceptable to join in the toast with a non-alcoholic drink.

In groups, it is customary to pour for others but not for oneself. One shows respect and consideration for others by keeping an eye on the levels of the glasses or cups of those nearby. The more polite way to serve another is to hold the sake bottle (*tokkuri*) in two hands, one underneath. At more formal gatherings, or as a party moves along, people use one hand for

pouring. When one is being poured for, always lift the glass or cup from the table; leaving it on the table is considered rude.

- One should avoid draining a glass of beer at one quaff, as an empty glass may be seen as an indication that you are no longer drinking. If your glass is partially full and you want to politely indicate that you do not wish to drink more, place your hand over the glass and bow slightly to indicate that you appreciate the other person's kindness anyway. Some people turn the glass upside down to indicate that they have had enough.
- Japanese are unperturbed about alternately drinking sake, beer and whiskey. The fact that the vast majority of Japanese lack a particular enzyme the function of which is to break down alcohol, means that some people can become quite inebriated in a short space of time.

6. Special Occasions

Tea Ceremonies

If you are invited to attend a tea ceremony, be sure to enquire about the formality of the occasion.

For a formal occasion, women should wear a one-piece dress, or skirt and blouse, and men should wear a suit and tie. An informal setting does not require formal clothing, but still requires a quiet manner. Either way, be aware that you will be stocking-footed and be seated for a long period on tatami, so avoid tight clothing or threadbare socks.

Each school of tea ceremony has its own rules of behaviour for the host or hostess. If it is your first time, someone will either show you by example or teach you the proper manners.

In general, the guest will bow at the entrance to the room, greet the other guests with a bow, and sit down in the place indicated. One is firstly served a small cake (o-kashi) that is eaten in several bites. Pick up the plate the cake is served on and hold it beneath the cake while you are eating. Take care (as you would elsewhere) that you do not drop crumbs.

When the tea is served, bow to the guests who have not been served, pick up the bowl in your right hand, and then hold it in both hands. Turn the bowl clockwise two quarter turns (to avoid drinking from the front of the bowl) and drink the tea in several sips. When finished drinking, turn the bowl counter-clockwise to the original position and place the bowl in front of you, just beyond the seam of the tatami. Make a formal bow to the host or hostess.

Once your turn is over, the next person will be served. Polite conversation may be made while the other guests are being served, but avoid being talkative or loud. At the completion of the ceremony, everyone takes a bow of gratitude for the event, and then departs.

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KOREA

1. Introduction

The Korean people are noted for their warmth and generosity - characteristics that reflect the respect for courtesy advocated in the teachings of Confucius.

In public, however, Koreans are not demonstrative and may appear quite reserved, especially in the presence of strangers who are foreigners. In their homes, or places of work, that reserve is not evident.

In one sense that reserve is compounded by the practice among Koreans in big cities, of pushing and shoving in a way that would be unthinkable in Western cities. Moreover, there will be no attempt to apologise or to treat visitors differently. Similarly, Western visitors may find that despite their reserve, Koreans will stand very close in subways and on public transport - a practice that may be awkward for visitors who are used to having more personal space allowed to them.

Understanding these behaviours which have been prompted over time by the density of urban populations, will enable the Westerner to interact appropriately with Korean colleagues.

2. Communicating

Greeting

The appropriate way to greet Korean colleagues is to bend your upper body slightly. (Unlike the Japanese, Koreans bow sparingly.) Amongst men you may also offer your hand. There are no hard and fast rules about which person should initiate a handshake. While the senior person will generally offer the hand first if two Koreans meet, the same rules do not apply to foreigners. Korean women rarely shake hands.

Names / Titles

Many Koreans share the same surname, though they may not be related. Families distinguish themselves by place of origin, such as 'Andong'. Thus you will find that the 'Andong Kims' are a family whose clan shrine is in Andong. Given names are also important in distinguishing people. Most will be two syllables with one of the syllables frequently being shared by all the male family members in one generation.

In the past, Koreans rarely used their given names, and it is still regarded as impolite to use an adult's given name alone. Thus Jeong Yun-Hee would not be addressed as Yun-Hee but as Miss Jeong Yun-Hee. The English terms: Mr, Mrs and Miss have been adopted by Koreans and are used frequently with surnames.

While overseas Koreans usually put their given names first, in Korea the opposite is true. The family name comes first followed by the given name(s).

Korean women retain their own surnames after marriage, but children carry their father's family name.

Within the family, individuals have different titles which reinforce their place in the hierarchy. A girl, for example, calls her older brother oppa, her older sister onni, but her younger brothers and sisters by their given names. A boy calls his older brother hyong, his older sister nuna, and his younger brothers and sisters by their given names. Maternal aunts and uncles have different titles from paternal aunts and uncles. The use of different titles depending on who is talking reflects the

importance Koreans attach to the precise expression of family relations in a society that is family and clan-centred.

At work, people usually go by their surname and work title e.g. President Kim, or Director Chang.

Eye Contact / Handshake / Posture

Koreans tend to avoid too much eye contact and consider it bad manners to look straight into another person's eyes throughout a conversation. Extended direct eye contact can be considered rude. Koreans fix their gaze between the eyes and the nose of the other person and will often glance downwards. Failure to 'look somebody in the eye' is not considered a sign of weakness in Korea. Neither is it seen as weakness to have a light hand shake. A 'firm' handshake is not necessary - just a touch will do.

It is appropriate to sit up straight in meetings, and when standing avoid putting your hands in your pockets. The latter is regarded as bad manners.

Conversation

When meeting for the first time, a group of Koreans will make efforts to find common links e.g. through family, school or university connections. This is because the sense of being part of a group, of being 'one of us', is very important to Koreans. They therefore value commonly held experiences or interests as a basis on which to build relations. As a foreign visitor you too will be questioned, and perhaps discover that you have hobbies in common or have attended the same university.

The strong link between the individual and the group in Korean society is reflected in the practice some Koreans have of referring to Korea as "our country", their wives as "our wife" and their house as "our house" etc.

New Korean acquaintances will also ask questions quite directly about details of your life: age, education, religion, whether you are married or have children. This may be disconcerting at first but it is not rudeness on the part of Koreans. Rather it is seen as gathering important information that allows the Koreans to position themselves in relation to you, and to interact with you.

3. Korean Behaviours / Values

Relating to the Aged

There is traditional and widespread respect among Koreans for those who are older. It is therefore not advisable to sit until those more senior have taken their seats, and it is appropriate to stand up when someone more senior enters the room.

When travelling on buses, trains and subways it is becoming less common for those seated to offer their seat to someone older. Many, including the young, will still do this when they recognise older people or those with a baby. One traditional practice still in use is that of the seated passenger offering to hold a standing passenger's heavy bags.

Friends

There is a distinction in Korea between friends and acquaintances. "Friend" in Korea conveys the idea of 'close friend' in English. For Koreans, friendship involves obligations. Thus, if you establish a friendship with a Korean, a level of commitment is expected.

Public Behaviour

Koreans do not show affection to members of the opposite sex in public except to small children. They will not be offended if foreigners exchange a brief hug or kiss on greeting but will be surprised if it is repeated.

Korean women would feel uncomfortable if they were kissed or embraced in public by a male. At the same time there is widespread acceptance of demonstrated affection between girls or women.

Displays of bad temper are regarded as the height of bad manners and are unlikely to succeed. It is also best to avoid direct criticism as far as possible. If criticism is necessary, do it indirectly and not in public. Direct criticism will embarrass your colleague and discourage cooperation.

Women

Neither women nor children ranked very highly in Confucius' priorities. In the past, a woman was taught to be obedient to her parents, her husband, and in old age to her son. Much of this has changed in terms of the scope women have for independence, yet the notions of male superiority and female subordination have not entirely disappeared.

Korean women are therefore not used to the courtesies shown to a woman in the West. They may be pleased when a foreigner opens a door for them, but they may appear embarrassed because the practice is unusual. In contrast, a Western woman in Korea may find she is not treated as she is at home, even if she is conducting business in her own right. As a visitor she will be invited out and treated courteously, but will not be included in post-work entertainment.

4. Business Etiquette

Name / Business Cards

After the introduction, it is customary to present your name card. Name cards are important communication tools and are used extensively in Korea, so you should ensure that you have copies of your own business card to give away, and a wallet for storing those you receive. Cards should be offered with both hands if possible, or failing that, with the right hand. (Note: this is true when handing anything to an older person.) When you receive a business card from your Korean counterpart it is appropriate to study the card a little before putting it away.

Conversation

Koreans often do not speak immediately about money in business conversations. You might therefore choose to delay discussion of specifics about money.

In Korea questions are answered literally, that is, when a question is asked in the negative e.g. "Aren't you going to lunch?", a Yes response means "Yes, I'm not going to lunch", and a No means "No, I am going to lunch".

Dress

Koreans tend to dress formally during the working week. Men will generally wear dark-coloured Western suits, although there are some exceptions. If in doubt, men visiting Korea on business should wear a tie.

Women will find that their Korean counterparts dress conservatively. Bare shoulders are not acceptable, and short skirts are not appropriate for professional or older women. Foreigners do not have to conform exactly to Korean standards, but for those doing business in Korea it is wise not to depart significantly from Korean practice. Wearing clothes appropriate to the occasion is seen as a mark of discernment.

Appropriate dress is seen as important even for leisure. Koreans take leisure seriously, so if you are invited to play golf or tennis, or even go on a picnic, it is important that you dress correctly. Koreans will appreciate that you have made the effort.

5. Dining and Entertainment

Food and Tableware

Food is eaten with a metal spoon and a pair of metal chopsticks. Unlike the Japanese and Chinese, who use chopsticks for eating rice, Koreans use a spoon. It is thought to be somewhat gauche to use chopsticks for rice, though younger Koreans tend to use chopsticks. Try to master the use of chopsticks and spoon as a courtesy to your hosts and for your own convenience. You will not need a knife as the food comes ready cut into bite-size pieces. A knife is considered a coarse object to bring to a table.

Traditionally, rice, soup and kimchi were served at all meals. The Korean preference for soups and juicy foods which were easy to share, reflected their appreciation of food that would bring them closer together. Now many younger Koreans have turned to Western style cereals or toast as an alternative breakfast.

Conversation

While in Western cultures people eat slowly enjoying conversation as they dine, Koreans tend to eat quickly believing that talk at the dinner table is inappropriate. There is rarely any conversation during a meal. This is in part due to Korea's Confucian past, but there are other practical reasons. Traditionally, food is not served in staged courses but all at once, so if people want to enjoy their food while it is still hot, they need to eat quickly.

Conversation and the Hostess

Korean men tend to be strict about drawing a line between work and home. Business will generally not be discussed at home. Most Korean wives will know little about their husbands' business and would not expect to discuss it. It is safest to keep to discussion of subjects such as children or family matters with most Korean wives.

If invited to a Korean home, you will find that the hostess probably does not join you for dinner. Even if there are servants, she will be busy preparing and supervising the food. She may join you at the end of the evening, but it is unlikely she will eat with you. You should also be prepared for references to the lack of food suitable for guests. This is standard politeness, not to be taken too seriously. Food in large quantities will appear.

Seniority

While traditions are changing, one that remains is that the oldest person starts the meal first. The rest of the family will eat only after the oldest person has eaten a spoonful. It is also considered rude to leave the table before the elder finishes.

Taboos

Refusing food or drink can be embarrassing for your host. While you are not expected to consume everything that is put in front of you, try at least a token amount of the dishes offered. Your hosts will appreciate your enjoyment of Korean foods.

Koreans consider it indelicate to lift the bowl of soup or rice to the lips, or to use hands to pick up food.

Seating

In a traditional restaurant and in many homes, food will be served on low, lacquered tables, with each diner having his or her rice and soup, and sharing other dishes. Diners sit on cushions on the floor.

Eating Out

In a restaurant you will often be brought a hot towel - cold in summer - to wipe your hands before the meal, and another at the end. Meals will usually end with fresh fruit. You might be offered beer with your meal, or else a Korean tea. Corn tea is particularly popular. It is served hot in winter and cold in summer.

When you leave a restaurant or a bar, you will not normally need to worry about the bill if you have been invited by a Korean colleague. The best way to repay hospitality is to invite your Korean friends to dinner after you have been entertained several times.

Koreans also prefer to have one person pay the whole bill, rather than have friends pay their bill individually. It upsets their sense of the "group" and their traditional belief that friendly relations should override material considerations.

Drinking

Koreans like drinking. Drinking parties among men are common and popular. A few drinks in a bar will go a long way towards friendship, or to assisting a business deal. Koreans do not generally drink alone, and do not drink much without eating substantial snacks called anju. This does not stop them getting drunk. There is no stigma attached to getting drunk among men. Drinking together may be seen as an opportunity to let off steam and to criticise the boss to his face, but without the consequences this might have in the West. The convention is that remarks made at drinking parties are not referred to the next day. Nevertheless, a certain prudence is required.

Beer is very popular in Korea. Western style wine is made in South Korea. The most common traditional Korean alcoholic drinks are soju, the cheapest, most popular, generally the strongest and rather like vodka; makoli, a milky white drink, sometimes compared to beer and getting rarer; and chongjong, a rice wine, similar to Japanese sake.

In the past, Korean women did not drink until they were over 60. Today it is not unusual for a Korean woman to take a glass of wine at a dinner, though most still drink fruit juice. Women rarely get drunk - it is bad form for them to do so - and a Western woman will need to take this into account.

If you do not drink alcohol, your decision will be quite readily accepted by Koreans, many of whom do not drink for religious or other reasons.

6. Taboos

Colour

Traditionally white clothes were worn only for mourning, rather than black. The white was a special kind of off-white hemp, rarely seen except at funerals today. A white mourning band is still common, but black bands are also worn. Today women might wear a white hairpin as a mark of mourning. They would not otherwise wear white in their hair.

Koreans frown on the use of red ink to write the names of living people. At funerals the dead person's name is written on a red banner to ward off evil spirits; red ink is used to record deaths on the clan register.

Gesture

It is taboo to use the left hand to offer an object to somebody, particularly if they are senior in age or rank to you. It is best to use both hands, and if that is not possible, to use the right hand.

Do not touch a teenager or an adult on the head. While it is acceptable to touch children gently on the head, it is regarded as most inappropriate to do so roughly. It is probably best to err on the side of caution and avoid touching Koreans of any age on the head.

Numbers

Koreans still avoid the number 4 (sa) since it has the same pronunciation as the word for death. You will often find Korean buildings do not have a fourth floor or that the letter 'F' replaces the number 4. Because Koreans are aware of Western superstitions about the number 13, it too may be missing.

7. Gift-Giving

Gift-giving is a very important part of Korean culture. As well as giving gifts on important occasions such as weddings, birthdays and graduations, Koreans give gifts to mark festivals and other events. Gifts offered at New Year and chusok (the harvest festival) are particularly important. Students give gifts to teachers, office staff to bosses, as a mark of their appreciation. A visiting foreigner on business will collect a number of gifts in the form of commemorative plaques, paperweights and mementos.

Visitors and Giving

Whilst it is not essential to have a return gift, it is recommended that you have some small gifts (e.g. souvenirs of Australia or the University) which you can give in return.

If invited to a wedding it is polite to bring a gift. It is perfectly acceptable to give money on such occasions, enclosed in an envelope bearing the name of the giver. Whatever the gift, it will be welcomed as an indication of your understanding of Korean culture.

Giving and Receiving Gifts

In giving and receiving gifts a degree of diffidence is required. You should offer your own gift with suitable expressions of its unworthiness. Your Korean host will do the same. Generally, when a gift is offered, you may make a modest show of refusing it, but accept it if your host insists. To really refuse a gift is insulting and shows a lack of understanding of Korean ways. Once the gift is accepted, you should not open it in the presence of the giver unless strongly pressed.

Types of Gifts

When invited to a home, gifts such as wine or whiskey are appreciated. They are best wrapped. International brand names are less important than an air of good quality and good wrapping. Koreans would never consider giving a gift in a plastic bag. The latter are for carrying shopping.

Good quality jams and soaps are likely to be appreciated, as are books about your own country. If the people have children, a present for them would not be out of place. Presents for children, however, should supplement not replace those for parents. One small gift often highly appreciated is copies of photographs taken during a visit.

Bribes

There may be occasions when a gift seems to be intended as a bribe. Such a gift will often be in the form of a white envelope containing money. If you have any doubt, it is best to return the gift without opening it as soon as possible. Your action will be well understood.

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MALAYSIA

1. Introduction

The Federation of Malaysia is a modern industrialised country. While it still exports agricultural products and raw materials, it has transformed its economy from one that relied on these, to one based on modern manufacturing and service industries, including tourism. It is a country from which students and staff are drawn to this University.

2. Background

Malaysia is multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-cultural. Muslim Malays constitute over half the population (currently estimated at over 20 million), but there are significant numbers of Chinese (5.3 million) and Indians (1.5 million), as well as a large number of other different ethnic groups which constitute about 2% of the population.

Malaysia retains much of its Asian cultural heritage despite significant evidence of a colonial past and widespread use of English. The major elements of Indigenous Malay culture form the basis of the national identity. The national language is Malay, the national religion Islam.

While the strong fundamentalist views of the Muslim political organisations have influenced Malay society and culture, the Malaysian government has sought to exercise a moderating influence in the interests of maintaining inter-racial harmony and an open economy.

For all Malaysians, family and community values are strong. This strong sense of family/community connectedness accounts for the tendency to subordinate individual interests to the needs of the collective.

It is important for the visitor to recognise the diversity of Malaysian society and also to understand the importance that Malays attach to social harmony and consensus. In that context, the visitor will recognise the need to devote time to consultation and to collective decision making.

3. Communicating

Language

English is the language of business and tourism in Malaysia and is widely spoken. However, this does not mean that it is easy for Malaysians to understand a conversation in English. The visitor should therefore be considerate of Malaysian colleagues when speaking in English.

Speaking loudly will not assist your Malaysian colleagues to understand you. What will help your Malaysian colleagues is if you avoid speaking rapidly and using colloquial English. Politeness demands that you speak clearly at a moderate pace and in complete sentences.

While there are a number of languages spoken in Malaysia, most of the people will know Malay. It is useful (and courteous) to acquire some basic Malay words e.g. 'tolong' - 'please', and 'terima kasih' - 'thank you'. Visitors should not be offended if Malaysians speak among themselves in their own language. Such conversation is not intended to exclude others; rather it is seen by your Malaysian colleagues as communicating.

Greetings

Malays

Urbanised Malays will often shake hands, but usually quite gently - more a brief touch than a clasp. Women may not wish to shake hands. When a woman does not offer her hand it is appropriate to nod or bow slightly. Strong handshakes, back-slapping or elbow grabbing as well as embracing and kissing, are not appropriate in Malaysia.

Malaysian Chinese

Malaysian Chinese will usually shake hands.

Malaysian Indians

Malaysian Indian men and women will usually shake hands. The traditional Indian greeting is for each person to put his or her palms together in a prayer position with the hands to the chest and a slightly bowed head. The visitor may use this form of greeting, particularly where an Indian woman does not offer her hand to shake.

Names / Titles

Malays

In the Malay tradition a person's first name is used in greeting together with the title of Mr or Mrs. For example, Rashid Abdullah or Rashid bin Abdullah - Rashid the son of Abdullah, will be addressed as (Mr) Rashid, or the Malay equivalent Encik (pronounced enche or inche) Rashid if a young man, and Tuan Rashid if addressing an older man.

Malays also use occupational titles in address e.g. a teacher would be addressed as Encik (Mr) guru or Cikgu (pronounced chigu or chegu) for short. Professional titles such as Doctor or Professor should be respected and used. There are many other titles by which Malaysians may be identified. These are often awarded by royalty as a reward or recognition of the individual.

Malaysian Chinese

When addressing a Chinese person use the title Mr, Mrs or Miss followed by the surname. The first name in the sequence is the family name, so Tan Chee Beng is Mr Tan.

Malaysian Indians

The majority of Indians (other than Sikhs) do not have surnames as such. They are addressed and referred to by their personal name e.g. B. Siva or Siva B. would be called Mr Siva (his personal name).

Malaysian Sikhs

Sikh names are readily recognised. "Singh" indicates a man and is placed after the personal name e.g. Ranjit Singh. The indicator of a female is "Kaur" which is added to a personal name as in Amarjit Kaur. A married woman uses her own name not her husband's.

Body Language

Pointing at or beckoning someone with the index finger is regarded as very rude in Malaysia. The appropriate way is to point with one's thumb, bending it slightly with the fingers folded in the palm. To summon someone, hold the hand out, palm down and move the fingers together towards one's body. The idea is to gesture discreetly with the hand, not in a pointed or direct way.

Smiling

Malaysians, and South East Asians in general, smile a lot. The visitor should also smile, especially when greeting colleagues and introducing themselves.

Standing

Avoid standing with your hands on your hips, or displaying mannerisms that suggest impatience, arrogance or annoyance. Control and order are desirable to all groups.

Sitting

If seated, do not fold your legs or point your foot at someone. More importantly, do not show someone the soles of your shoes. Try to sit with both legs tucked to your side, either to the right or left, with your feet pointing away from your guests.

Shoes

If you are visiting a Malaysian at home it is customary to remove your shoes before entering, unless you are told otherwise. Some hosts will be quite relaxed about this custom and not expect you to remove your shoes. If you are unsure, ask your host.

Greeting Elders

Remember also to greet elders and introduce yourself to them first. Do not stand back and expect them to come to you.

Touching the Head

In SE Asia the head is regarded as sacred. Do not touch someone's head, and do not pat small children on the head.

Giving and Receiving with the Right Hand

Always take food offered to you with the right hand; the left hand is regarded as unclean.

4. Gift-Giving

Beware of giving or receiving expensive gifts, particularly if you are on business. Small gifts are appropriate. Flowers, fruits, sweets or biscuits or something from one's own country are appreciated.

A bottle of spirits will be welcomed by Chinese. It will not, however, be appropriate for Muslims or Hindus.

When giving or receiving a gift remember that gifts are usually not unwrapped in public or in front of the giver. To do so is considered rude.

Taboos

Generally, sharp instruments, clocks and handkerchiefs - with their inappropriate associations with severing, the passage of time or tears - are not welcomed as gifts in Asian cultures. Articles such as letter openers are therefore not suitable.

5. Business Etiquette

The way in which business is conducted in Malaysia is significantly influenced by the value Malaysians attach to the group or collective, as well as to trust and respect between members of a family or community. Recognising these values and the importance of ethics to Malaysians, the foreign visitor will proceed carefully when establishing relations.

- Take time to get to know potential business partners; they wish to know something of your background, character and status and prefer to do business with people they like. It takes time to build connections and reach agreements. Social meetings, dining together, and inviting you to their home are part of building confidence and actually doing business.
- From the visitor's point of view, opportunities to mix with Malaysian colleagues on social occasions allow the visitor to recognise the status of potential partners, to appreciate the kind of etiquette and respect that are appropriate, and in turn to observe that etiquette in subsequent discussions.

Face to Face Contact

Malaysians value face to face meetings. Do not expect to rely heavily on phone, fax or email.

Business Cards

Business cards containing details of the title and status of the business person are an important part of commercial transactions. When offered a business card, the visitor should receive and hold it in both hands, and study it respectfully before placing it carefully in a wallet or holder.

6. Recognising Malaysian Values

Influence of Family Connections

Visiting business people should be aware that Malaysian business operations are often based on close personal, family and ethnic ties, and on patronage.

The Importance of Bureaucracy

It is important to recognise the role of the Malay bureaucracy and to observe procedure by taking all necessary bureaucratic steps.

Losing Face

The notion of losing face is an important concept to the Malaysian people. To the Malaysian, it is important not to lose standing or honour in front of others. "Face" is a matter of both self respect and the respect of others.

Respecting Emotions

Emotions play a more important role in negotiations by Malaysians. In contrast to Western business people who tend to put emotions aside while they argue logically and objectively, Malaysians, and in particular Malays, allow emotions and inner feelings to influence their decision making. They are more concerned than their Western counterparts with the need to preserve social harmony. They stress the importance of courtesy, humility and deference, and act in a way that will avoid anyone losing face. The foreign visitor should make every effort to avoid embarrassing their Malaysian colleagues or causing them to lose face.

The Value of Tact

While Westerners may value open and frank discussion, even confrontation on some issues, Malaysians prefer tact and compromise. In the same vein, Malaysians regard criticising or humiliating someone in public for their shortcomings or wrong doing as rude and thoughtless. When visitors behave in this way, they bring censure on themselves and lose the esteem of others far more significantly than the person they have criticised.

Using an Intermediary

Where a visiting business person is concerned about the performance / behaviour of his or her colleagues, it is appropriate to demonstrate concern through an intermediary rather than through face to face confrontation.

Interpreting Malaysian Behaviour

The Malay's attachment to tact and consideration for preserving face and avoiding conflict, can create difficulties for the foreigner in interpreting the significance of smiles, nods or silences. The Malaysian smile can mean a range of things. It may, when accompanied by a nod, mean agreement or enthusiasm. It may alternatively mean "I hear you", but not necessarily "I agree with you". It may be used as a way of avoiding confrontation or admitting ignorance. The visitor will gradually learn to recognise subtle changes in facial expression, tone of voice and manner that indicate the significance of the smile.

Silence

Malaysians are not uncomfortable with silences during business discussions. They see silence as allowing the parties to evaluate progress, or to retrieve a tense situation.

Behaving Appropriately

Appropriate social interaction and etiquette in Malaysia involve more than a general sensitivity to the "dos" and "don'ts" outlined above. Malaysians genuinely respect the rights of others, and act to maintain the harmony of the group. They are rightly proud of their emergence as an independent, rapidly changing country which commands their loyalty. The visitor must recognise that for all the cosmopolitan sophistication of the Malaysian, real cultural differences remain and are cherished. Be careful then to respect those differences, to remember that this country and its people are not seeking merely to imitate the West.

Taboos

Granted the pride Malaysians take in their own development, visitors should avoid drawing comparisons with the way things are done elsewhere.

Similarly, they should refrain from focussing attention on the ethnic issues within Malaysian politics - Malaysians may delight in speaking out on politics, but they do not appreciate the stranger taking the same liberty.

Credentials

There are unscrupulous individuals who may offer lavish gifts and promises to the visitor, but who are not to be trusted. It is therefore important to check out the credentials of prospective business partners and their companies.

7. Dress

The foreign visitor should dress conservatively - unless attending a beach resort or participating in sport. Malaysia is a predominantly Muslim country and exposing too much flesh will possibly embarrass you and your host.

In view of the humid climate the general rule is to dress in light clothes. For business meetings or formal occasions a light weight suit or long sleeved shirt and tie are appropriate for men, and a smart blouse and knee length skirt or long sleeved dress are suitable for women - trousers should not be worn by women. Men should wear a suit and tie for formal appointments.

8. Dining

Importance of Sharing a Meal

Eating with business associates is regarded as a vital element in building the social relationships referred to above. Visitors to Malaysia can be assured that they will be invited to share a meal, attend a club, or join a working breakfast or lunch.

Chinese Hospitality

There is a tendency, particularly among Malays of Chinese descent, to carry out business over a meal. Visitors will find it helpful if they can use chopsticks - particularly at a Chinese banquet, but the fork and spoon used in Malay and Indian restaurants are usually available. If using chopsticks, avoid using them to pierce food, or getting them crossed. The small soup spoon can be used to dispose of waste food - bones, gristle etc - on to a side plate provided for this purpose. If one is not provided, feel free to request one.

Traditional Malay Hospitality

When dining with Malays or Indians the visitor may be invited to eat without the assistance of implements i.e. using the fingers. In this case, it is important that you use only the right hand - the left hand is reserved among Malays and Hindus for personal hygiene. You will be provided with a bowl of water or a water vessel for washing the right hand. It is handy to carry tissues or a handkerchief for drying your hand. Normally, you will be supplied with a spoon (on the right) and a fork (on the left).

Ramadhan

In the Muslim fasting month Ramadhan Muslims are forbidden to eat, drink or smoke between sunrise and sunset. You will only be invited to share a meal after sunset during that time. During this period women are busy preparing food during the restricted hours of the early morning and evening. It is inconsiderate to visit at such periods.

Dining Out

If you are the invited guest when you dine out, you will not be expected to pay, nor to share the cost. The bill is paid by the host. However, you should be ready to reciprocate and would be advised to seek advice as to where to take your guests so that you will not offend their religious or other sensibilities.

Reference

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MUSLIM CULTURE

1. Introduction

In countries which are predominantly Muslim, the influence of religion can be seen in some of the customs, behaviour and etiquette of the societies.

It is, however, important to note that the religion of Islam has a more profound effect on the faithful, than merely influencing etiquette. It shapes the pattern of the believer's life by being integral to choices on moral issues, and to decisions regarding the way one interacts with or treats others.

It is also important to note, that on the issue of etiquette, Muslims will often be seen to adopt the manners of the country in which they live - be that Bangladesh, Indonesia or Iraq. In some countries therefore, Muslims will display behaviours more typical of the resident country. In others, Muslims will be more strict about maintaining the symbols and practices of Muslim culture.

The following are some very general guidelines.

2. Communicating

Greeting

Muslims will generally greet you in the manner of the country in which they live - often that will be by shaking hands. Women however will not necessarily shake hands. Where a woman does not offer her hand, it is appropriate to acknowledge her by nodding. Amongst themselves, Muslims will greet each other with "Salaam", or with a traditional greeting.

Body Language

Common sense dictates that a visitor would always avoid physical contact e.g. an arm around the shoulders which can appear over-familiar or intimidating.

Eye contact should be used with sensitivity. This is often a cultural issue that is influenced by local practice. Singaporeans for example, dislike 'staring' and can easily mistake eye contact for staring. Most err on the side of caution and keep eye contact to a minimum until they are comfortable with you. In Bangladesh you will find people reluctant to look into your eyes. They will look at your face, rather than into your eyes.

For Muslims, pointing may be seen as rude - especially if directed at a person. When pointing something out, use the whole hand not just one finger; and make the motion gentle rather than prodding.

Similarly, in some countries such as Thailand, touching the head of another can be seen as insulting. While acceptable in Bangladesh as an expression of compassion, it is not acceptable elsewhere.

3. Gift-Giving

The exchange of gifts between business colleagues is fairly widely practised throughout Asia. It is clearly an acceptable gesture, but there are some matters the visitor should take into account.

Make sure the gift is appropriate to the receiver. This will often be determined by a person's religious beliefs. Thus a bottle of spirits will not be appropriate for a Muslim since the Muslim religion forbids the consumption of alcohol.

4. Business Etiquette

In predominantly Muslim countries, the influence of the religious tradition of Islam on social and business conventions can be discerned. Time, for example, is punctuated by the five times of prayer - fajr, 'dawn', dhuhr, 'noon', 'asr, 'afternoon', maghrib, 'sunset', and isha, 'evening'. People will arrange to meet you around these times, for example 'after afternoon prayer'.

The two main events of the Islamic year are Ramadhan - 'the fasting month', and Dhu Ihijja - 'the Pilgrimage Month'. During Ramadhan Muslims are forbidden to eat, drink or smoke between sunrise and sunset. You will only be invited to share a meal after sunset during that time. Granted that during this period women are busy preparing food during the restricted hours of the early morning and evening, it is not considerate to visit. It is also best, out of politeness, not to eat, drink or smoke in public during fasting hours.

In dealing with Muslim people patience is important. The quality of sabur, which means both 'patience' and 'steadfastness in adversity', is much admired; while impatience is looked down on.

For Muslims, one of the clear differences between the Western way and their own way of dealing with others, is in the deference accorded to senior people. Be aware that for Muslims deference is important, and ensure that you show appropriate respect.

5. Dress

The foreign visitor should dress conservatively.

In some Muslim countries such as Saudi Arabia, men's dress covers the body completely. Shorts should never be worn and even short-sleeved shirts and tight fitting T-shirts are frowned upon. Equally, to have too many top buttons of a shirt undone is regarded as indecent.

At an important business meeting it is advisable to wear a suit and tie as this shows you have made an effort. However, in some climates, Westerners find wearing a suit difficult and allowances are made for them.

The dress code for women in Muslim societies is quite clear. Women visitors should therefore dress modestly with appropriate respect for the Muslim expectation that a woman's arms and legs should be covered. Dressing in a way that exposes too much of the body may embarrass your host, or yourself.

6. Do's and Don'ts

A number of behaviours regarded by Westerners as acceptable, are seen by Muslims as unacceptable, and vice versa.

- If you eat with your hands, use only your right hand - the left is reserved by Muslims for personal hygiene.
- If you serve another person, or offer a gift, use either your right hand or both hands.
- If you visit the home of a Muslim family, many will have an altar where family members say their prayers. You are not required to make any gesture of respect towards the altar, but be careful that you do not inadvertently stand or sit on the family prayer rug in a Muslim home, or touch the Koran without asking permission.
- If you are visiting a Muslim home, it is customary to remove your shoes before you enter.

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Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States

1. The People

The people of Saudi Arabia are conscious of representing a cultural tradition that extends back to the time of the prophet Mohammed and before. This cultural tradition is embodied in their language and in their customs of hospitality, generosity and tribal and family honour.

Importantly, Saudi Arabia was never the object of imperialist control. Consequently, there is no sense of anti-imperial resentment in the local population. Indeed Arabs regard Europeans as equals and guests, not as former oppressors.

2. Religion

At the centre of many of the social and business conventions in Arab countries is the influence of the religious tradition of Islam. Time, for example, is punctuated by the five times of prayer - fajir, 'dawn', dhuhr, 'noon', 'asr, 'afternoon', maghrib, 'sunset', and isha, 'evening'. People will arrange to meet you around these times, for example after afternoon prayer.

The two main events of the Islamic year are Ramadhan 'the fasting month' and Dhu Ihijja 'the Pilgrimage Month'. During Ramadhan, no food is taken from dawn to dusk. It is best, out of politeness, not to eat, drink or smoke in public during fasting hours.

The Islamic year is lunar, so that the months do not correspond consistently with the Western calendar.

3. Social Relations

Although quiet and formal in public, the Arabs are a friendly people and maintain longstanding friendships.

Greetings

The most common greeting is the handshake. However, a vigorous handshake is not expected. Arabs do not in fact 'shake' the hand, but clasp it for a moment. In the Arab handshake the hand is held firm with fingers together and straight. The other's hand is grasped using the thumb against the back of his hand. The hand must not be limp, which signifies effeminacy. Muslim women will not usually expect to shake hands. Where a woman does not offer her hand, it is appropriate to acknowledge her by nodding.

Arabs will sometimes also kiss on greeting each other. This is done where people are members of a group e.g. a tribe or family, or are close friends.

The Right Cheek Kiss

Here the two people will touch right cheek to right cheek, while clasping the right hand of the other and perhaps resting the left hand on the upper right forearm. Cheeks are touched three times in quick succession in a sort of symbolic kiss with slight forward and backward motions of the head, followed by one longer touch.

The Nose Kiss

Each touches the bridge of the other's nose with the lips, the right hand clasped in the other's right hand and the left resting on the other's right shoulder. As a mark of respect each will attempt to kiss the other's nose first. Strictly speaking the less senior person should kiss the nose of the other first, but it is expected that the senior person will show some resistance.

Meeting People

The most common greeting is salaam 'aleikum - 'Peace be upon you', the reply being 'aleikum assalaam - 'and on you peace'.

Entering a Majlis

Any group of men sitting together constitutes a majlis. Approach a majlis with dignity and when you come within greeting distance, say salaam 'aleikum to the whole group. The group will respond 'aleikum assalaam and will stand.

People will not acknowledge you until you greet them, as they are giving you time to prepare. As you enter and the group rises, try to make your way towards the host. It will usually be clear who this is. Do not hurry. Shake hands but do not linger talking to the host too long; instead move to your left and shake hands with each man in turn. This is important.

Meeting people is regarded as a formal and therefore a serious occasion. In a very large majlis the members will stand in waves and you may be ushered to your seat before you have shaken hands with everyone. When you are seated, people will call haphazard greetings to you. You are now part of the majlis and any newcomers will greet you. Always treat all men in a majlis as equals. All ages appear at a majlis.

Sitting Posture

Sitting posture is important. It is unwise to cross one leg over the other with the sole of the foot pointing to one side as it may be pointing to another guest, which is impolite. Neither should you stretch your legs in front of you. Try to adopt a compact sitting position, which does not intrude on the space of others in the room. You may cross one leg over the other, but make sure the shins are vertical and the foot is pointing downwards. This is important and just because no one comments, do not think they haven't noticed. Comment will be made after you have left.

If sitting on the floor sit either cross-legged or with one leg crooked under the other. It is worth ensuring the trousers you wear are not too tightly fitting, otherwise you may sit in discomfort.

Right and Left Hand

You only take or give something with your right hand, whether it is a coffee cup, a pen or money.

Equally when entering a room, the most senior person will often be on the right. This is useful to remember when going through doors or in and out of lifts. The man on the right always leads.

Coffee

The central feature of Arab social life in the majlis or office is the taking of coffee. The coffee-server carries the coffee pot in the left hand and a column of six or so cups about the size of egg-cups in the right, one inside the other. In a large majlis the server will approach the host first, and carry on around the room from the right of the host. When you are offered a cup, take it in your

right hand. There is no need to thank the server. A small amount will have been poured in the bottom of the cup. This is usually quite hot, so you should swirl it round the cup and sip it slowly.

When you have finished do not put the cup down, but keep hold of it in your right hand. The coffee-server will return to you and take the cup and pour a second and then a third. When you have had the third, shake the cup as you give it back. This signals you have had enough. This is the general rule but in fact you can have as many cups as you like, or equally you can refuse the first. However, it would be impolite to refuse the first cup, especially on your first visit. Always take the cup in the right hand and do not put it down on carpet or table. Hold the cup delicately by the finger tips.

Tea

Coffee and tea are served in succession in the majlis. The tea is brought round on a tray in small glasses already sugared but with no milk. Occasionally the tea is flavoured with saffron. Somewhat less reverence is accorded to the tea glass than the coffee cup as these are washed after each person has used them. They can therefore be placed on the carpet or table after you have finished with them.

Leaving

It is not necessary to shake hands with the host on leaving but merely to say *fi amaan ilaah* 'In God's keeping'. Neither should you make an appointment for the next day or remind the host of another appointment when you are leaving. If you wish to make another appointment do it while still sitting. Then after an interval get up and take your leave.

Small Talk

You are not expected to initiate conversation at the first or second meetings - your presence is usually considered enough. In fact, a person who insists on talking a lot when not well known to the group, will be regarded as pushy, and will be avoided. It is considered enough to answer polite enquiries about the journey and generally not to report bad or alarming news.

4. Dress

Arab men's dress covers the body completely. Shorts should not be worn, and short-sleeved shirts and tight fitting T-shirts avoided. Similarly, having too many top buttons of a shirt undone will be frowned upon.

At an important business meeting it is advisable to wear a suit and tie as this shows you have made an effort. However, Arabs are used to the fact that Westerners find wearing a suit difficult in their climate and will make allowances.

5. Dining

If an Arabian host invites you out, it will usually be to a large hotel where the menu will be similar to that in a Western hotel. Alcohol is not served in Saudi Arabia, Qatar and most of the Emirates. When invited out the host expects to pay, and you should not offer to pay yourself. If you have made the invitation you should pay and leave a reasonable tip for the waiter. It is not easy for a member of a sheikhly family to accept an invitation to eat out at someone else's expense. To do so leaves them open to a charge of inhospitality because in a general sense they are the host while you are in their country. Therefore do not be offended by a polite refusal.

A Traditional Arab Meal

If invited to an Arab home for a meal you will first be led into the majlis for a coffee. You will stay there until all guests have arrived and the meal has been laid out in an adjoining room. The traditional meal consists of a whole sheep, or a number of sheep, arranged on dishes of rice. Sometimes in the Gulf States high quality fish is also served. On special occasions a young camel may be offered.

When the meal is ready you will be summoned by your host. It is usually impossible for everyone to eat at once because of the numbers so it is polite to show some hesitation. If you are a principal guest you will be ushered forward. The meal may be served around a table but more often will be served on the floor as this gives flexibility about numbers. It will be on large dishes around which will be smaller dishes.

Guests sit either cross-legged or in a semi-kneeling position with one leg crossed under the other. The right hand is used to eat with. When all are gathered the host will say bismillaah, 'In the name of God', and begin to pick at the rice. You should say the same and do as your host does. It is impolite to eat too heartily at first. As a foreigner you may be offered a spoon but it is more enjoyable to use your hand, once you have got used to it. The host or another guest will pluck off pieces of meat and toss them in the rice in front of you. This is helpful because the meat is still very hot and the Arabs have become used to plucking it. If you wish to pick off your own morsels take only what is in front of you. It is considered rude to take what is in front of someone else. While waiting for the meat to cool, take a handful of rice, form it neatly into a ball with your fingers and place it in your mouth.

Very often there will be more than one sitting and others will be waiting to eat after you, so your group may rise all at once. Watch those around you. When they start to slow down and you notice them licking their fingers, it means they will be watching to see if you have finished. When all have finished you will stand and say alhamdulillah, 'Praise be to God'. You will be led to a place where you can wash your hands, and then shown back to the majlis.

Coffee and tea will again be served and then incense will be brought around. The guests will take the incense and hold it under their head cloths, while wafting the smoke towards them with their right hands. If you are not wearing a head cloth you cannot do this, but you can hold the incense in front of you and waft the smoke towards you. When this incense is brought in and passed around it signifies the end of the proceedings at which time you should get up and file out.

This description of the Arab meal is of very traditional behaviour you would expect to find in the home of a sheikhly family or a bedouin host and is designed for large numbers of guests.

6. Taboos

- Do not blow your nose or clear your throat in public.
- In traditional homes there will be a pair of plastic sandals at the door of the toilet. You should remove your own and put them on.
- Do not point the soles of your feet at people.
- Do not sit with your back to other people.
- Do not use your left hand to eat or pass or receive anything. Always use the right hand.
- Do not guffaw when you laugh. A polite chuckle is the norm.
- Do not raise your voice when speaking.
- While the giving of presents is appreciated though not obligatory, it is appropriate to keep the gift-giving until you are better acquainted.

- Do not eat while standing or walking about. Especially do not eat while walking in the street.
- Do not offer your hand to a woman, unless she offers first.
- If you arrive late to a meal and the others are already eating do not say salaam 'aleikum, say hannhum, 'God greet them'; they will reply minhum, 'Be one of them', which is an invitation to sit down.

7. Business

In Arab countries, patience is important. The quality of sabur, which means both 'patience' and 'steadfastness in adversity', is much admired; while impatience is looked down on.

People will welcome an opportunity to get to know you before entering transactions. If you do not know a person, it is worth calling to see them a few times before talking serious business.

Reaching a concrete agreement may take some time. Be prepared for changes of plan and modifications to the details of the project. It is best to retain an attitude of extreme flexibility since Arabs operate this way. Remember that Arab social life is more pervasive than our own and can interfere with business arrangements.

Reference

Ingham, Bruce The Simple Guide to Customs and Etiquette in Arabia and the Gulf States Global Books Ltd Kent, England 1994

SINGAPORE

1. Introduction

Singapore is a thriving business and manufacturing centre, with large numbers of foreign visitors and resident foreign business people. It is consequently a fairly cosmopolitan society which the Western visitor finds easy to fit into.

The native population consists of approximately 3 million people: 77% Chinese; 14% Malays; 7% Indians; and a number of other different ethnic groups making up the remaining 2%. Despite its multicultural mix the characteristic that strikes the Western visitor to Singapore is the country's intercultural harmony and tolerance.

2. Communicating

Language

English is the language of business and professional interaction in Singapore, and the main language used by Singaporeans. All students study the English language though they are also required to complete a second language.

Apart from English, other languages include: Malay; Mandarin and a number of Chinese dialects; Tamil; and other Indian dialects such as Hindi and Punjabi.

Greeting

A handshake is the generally accepted form of greeting between business associates who are widely accepting of western customs. The firmness and length of a handshake may vary as they do across Asia. The visitor is advised to be firm but not aggressive.

While the handshake is common practice in business and professional circles, you should be aware that among traditional Indians and Malays a handshake is not accepted practice - particularly for women. In general however, Singaporeans will shake hands when they are with Western colleagues.

Common sense dictates that a visitor would always avoid physical contact e.g. an arm around the shoulders which can appear over-familiar or intimidating.

Titles / Names

In addressing Singaporean colleagues and indeed interacting with them, you will find them less formal than the Japanese but still mindful of an appropriate level of formality on those occasions that call for it. Many Singaporeans will appear to conform to similar levels of formality to Australians. While you should address colleagues by their title plus surname, e.g. Dr Tan or Ms Lee, until advised to do differently, be prepared to follow their cue and adopt first names when encouraged to do so.

Body Language

Eye contact should be used with sensitivity. Singaporeans dislike 'staring' and can easily mistake eye contact for staring. Most err on the side of caution and keep eye contact to a minimum until they are comfortable with you.

For Muslims, pointing is also generally considered rude - especially if directed at a person. When pointing something out, use the whole hand not just one finger; and make the motion gentle rather than prodding.

Singaporeans are generally not comfortable with public displays of affection, though this is changing among the young.

3. Gift-Giving

The exchange of gifts between business colleagues is fairly widely practised, though some Singaporeans may do this because they believe it to be important to their Western visitors. It is clearly an acceptable gesture, but there are some matters the visitor should take into account.

- Be aware that Singapore has strict rules about accepting personal gifts from outside business contacts. Ensure your gift is suitable as a corporate present, keep it small and not too expensive.
- Make sure the gift is appropriate to the receiver. This will often be determined by a person's religious beliefs. Thus a bottle of spirits may be appropriate for a Chinese business colleague but not for a Muslim or Hindu, since both religions forbid the consumption of alcohol.
- If you are dealing with more traditional Chinese, avoid gifts such as:
 - + scissors or knives or sharp instruments which signify severing (of the relationship);
 - + clocks (which denote the passing of time for the receiver);
 - + handkerchiefs - designed to wipe away the receiver's tears;
 - + antiques - seen as the dwelling place of spirits that may not be benevolent; and
 - + pens - which translated literally in Chinese means "to break".
- Do not open gifts in front of the giver - and don't expect your Singaporean colleague to do this either. It is accepted practice that a gift is received and placed aside to be opened later when the giver is not present.

4. Business Etiquette

Business Cards

Business cards are widely used so you should ensure that you have cards to give. There is diversity in the way people receive and offer business cards. It is appropriate to take your cue from your Singaporean colleagues. It is appropriate to receive and present business cards with both hands and take time to read the card and put it away carefully - all of which indicate respect. On the other hand, you may be slightly less formal if your colleague is.

Protocols

At meetings, it is advisable to wait before you sit until you are told where your place is - otherwise you may offend because you lack understanding of the company's management structure or protocols. On some occasions you will not be told where you should sit; in this case simply avoid taking your place at the head of the table.

Face

The importance of “face” to your Singaporean colleagues must be understood. It means that you avoid humiliating or embarrassing them in a way that would make them hide their face. Ensure therefore that whatever you say or do does not belittle your colleague. In practice this means that you will be diplomatic - not confrontational, and that you will not undermine the position or status of the person you are dealing with.

Concern with avoiding loss of face is probably responsible for a number of behaviours in Chinese Singaporeans that may be misunderstood. Laughter, for example, will not always mean that the person concerned is amused by a situation. It may be a means of hiding embarrassment, or covering up ignorance or lack of understanding. It is important that the foreign visitor appreciate the Chinese concern with “losing face”, and learn to understand the meaning of non-verbal messages.

Understanding Body Language

Study your colleagues’ body language so that you can interpret signals accurately. You may pick up from these cues a sense that something is wrong. Recognise what indicates displeasure, lack of interest, or the reverse - enjoyment or willingness.

After-Hours Business

Business men in Singapore often keep their wives and families apart from their business lives, so do not assume that your spouse is included in an invitation to business entertainment. Never assume, always ask if you are in doubt.

Paying

It is commonplace in Singapore for business acquaintances to “fight over the bill” for business dining. The visitor is not expected / allowed to pay. If you have Singaporean colleagues visiting you, you will have the opportunity (and responsibility) to pay the bill.

5. Dress

Business dress for visitors is fairly formal in Singapore. A suit is certainly necessary for important meetings and formal events, but on the whole a long sleeved shirt and tie is acceptable. Women should dress with appropriate formality.

6. Do’s and Don’ts

A number of behaviours regarded by Westerners as acceptable, are seen by Singaporeans as unacceptable, and vice versa.

- Singapore has a system of fines for a range of ‘offences’ e.g. littering, illegal parking, speeding, gambling, smoking in prohibited areas, spitting, (as well as drug trafficking.) Simply observe the signs.
- A Singaporean may visit your home and ask how much it cost or where you bought certain items - this is accepted communication. Speaking about material possessions and their cost is commonplace.
- Tipping is not the norm, but is seen as a nice gesture where the service has been outstanding.
- As in the West, opening doors etc for women can be seen as patronising by some women, though appreciated by others.

7. Visiting a Singaporean Home

Most business entertaining is done in restaurants but very occasionally you will be invited to a colleague's home, especially during festivals.

- If you are invited to more than one home, pace yourself; you will be expected to eat and drink at each place.
- Gifts of chocolates or fresh fruit are appropriate. Be aware that fresh flowers do not have the appeal they do for westerners.
- Dress is usually casual unless otherwise specified, but beware of being too casual unless you are sure that it is appropriate.
- In most Singaporean homes it is customary to remove your shoes before you enter.
- Many homes will have an altar where family members say their prayers. You are not required to make any gesture of respect towards the altar, but be careful that you do not inadvertently stand or sit on the family prayer rug in a Muslim home, or touch the Koran without asking permission.
- In a Chinese household, dinner may be served early. Indians, however, generally tend to dine later.
- Feel free to greet or farewell those you see, especially those who are older than you, without waiting for an introduction. This is seen as respectful.
- In an Indian or Malay home where you are likely to eat with your hands, make sure you wash your hands before the meal - this is seen as good manners.
- If you eat with your hands, use only your right hand - the left is reserved by Hindus and Muslims for personal hygiene.
- If you serve another person, or offer a gift, use only your right hand.
- Indians use all their right-hand fingers to eat, while Malays tend to use only the lower digits of each finger. It takes practice to become competent in the way of the Indians and Malays at using your hands. While no one will be offended if you make a mess, it can be quite unappetising to watch, so learn from and copy your local companions.
- Remember that you will be expected to have a second helping - a compliment to the host/hostess - so pace yourself with small helpings the first time round.
- As in the West, it is considered polite not to take the last serving from the general platter/bowl.
- It is also appropriate as the meal ends, to leave a small amount of food e.g. rice on your plate to indicate that you have eaten sufficient food and are no longer hungry.
- Be aware that in traditional Indian or Malay homes the women of the house may not appear immediately, or may eat only after the men have eaten. However, this is not true of all households many of which are highly westernised.

Reference

Perera, Audrey The Simple Guide to Customs & Etiquette in Singapore Global Books Ltd England 1996