

# Do's and Taboos Around the World



Source: DO'S AND TABOOS AROUND THE WORLD  
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## Greetings / Gestures

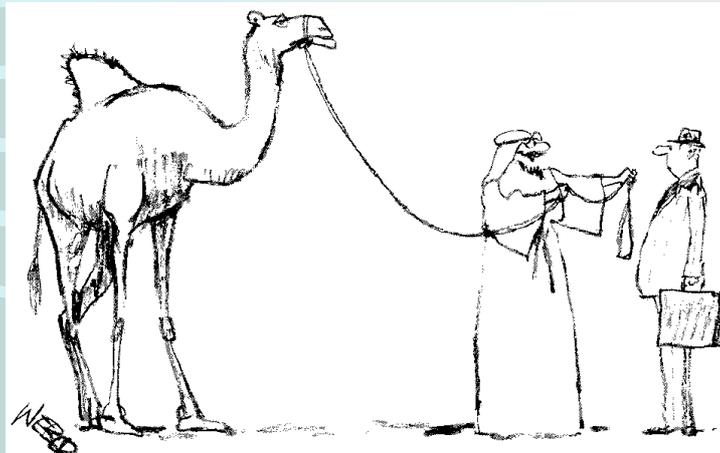
- **common in most countries: handshake**
- **don't pull your hand away if an Arab businessman walking with you takes your hand and holds it as you go. It's a sign of friendship**
- **kisses or embraces are common in Latin America and Southern Europe**
- **in some countries of the Middle East you have to get your shoes off before entering your hosts home**
- **In Paraguay the guest usually greets the host with a short, formal speech and asks permission to enter**
- **The left hand:**
  - in most countries of the Middle East and Asia when you may have to eat with your hands, don't use the left one or even touch food with the left hand!**
- **Punctuality:**
  - **in Germany it's more important than in any other country**
  - **in England you may be ten minutes too late but never be too early!**
  - **only taken seriously when attending a bullfight in Spain and Peru**

## Gifts (1)

- white lilies suggest death in Britain
- dahlias and chrysanthemums are associated with death in Spain
- in Brazil send flowers the next day, attention: purple flowers are a sign of death
- unwrap flowers in the entrance hall, don't take 13 or an even number of flowers, no red roses in Germany
- business gifts are not common in Ireland
- don't offer gifts to government officials in Zambia
- In Uruguay it's usual to send gifts before visiting
- presenting a knife to a Japanese is symbolically suggesting suicide

## Gifts (2)

- be careful about admiring your host's watch..., Arab businessmen are often very magnanimous - Don't refuse gifts!



In the Arab countries do not admire an object openly.  
You may be the recipient of it

## Eating / Drinking (1)

- In Chinese cultures you have to say no without saying it
  - bad manners for the host not to keep filling your dish
  - and for you not to keep eating as long as your dish is full
  - non-win-situation
- in Egypt it's impolite to eat everything on the plate
- never smoke before the Loyal Toast (toast at Her Majesty's health) at a formal dinner in Great Britain
- no shoptalk over drinks and dinner (as soon as the day is done so is business) in Britain
- don't ask for alcoholic drinks in the Middle East (in some countries alcohol is prohibited)

## Eating / Drinking (2)

- toasting in Sweden:
  - never toast your host until he does
  - never touch your drink until the host has said „skoal“
  - skoal: move the glass from the waistline to the eyes, look the other person directly in the eyes, say „skoal“, drink, make a wave of the glass towards you hosts eyes and bring it back down on the table
- in Zambia the guest should ask for food because it's impolite for the host to offer food first
- refusing meal twice before accepting it in Jordan is customary<sup>22</sup>

## Misunderstandings

- midwestern executive asked his Peruvian manager to send him the factory and office headcount broken down by sex.  
The reply: “249 in factory, 30 in office, 3 on sick leave, none broken down by sex - our problem is with alcohol.”
- “thinking is in parallel” means for Americans agreeing, his Japanese partner looked in the dictionary which said “parallel - two lines that never touch”
- American manager wanted to make a compliment to the short trousers of an Englishman calling them “knickers” instead of “plus fours”. He turned crimson because in GB “knickers” are ladies’ underpants.
- when an Englishman says that the project will be finished “at the end of the day” that means it will be done when it’s done

## Tips (1)

- England, Scotland and Wales:
  - avoid the word „English“, use „British“
  - the Scotch is what you drink -> Scots or Scotsmen
- Ireland:
  - offer your host to pay for a phone call
- Russia:
  - don’t export art objects
  - don’t change money with private citizens
  - never drop anything in the street
- Also in Singapore streets and other places are kept wonderfully clean -> don’t drop cigarette butt...
- never touch a persons head in Thailand

## Tips (2)

- **South Korea**
  - **blowing your nose in front of others is considered bad manners**
  - **women are not very liberated**
    - ✓ **men go through doors first**
    - ✓ **women help men with their coats**
- **Don't talk about the Persian Gulf in the Middle East, it's the Arabian Gulf!**
- **In Saudi Arabia women are forbidden to drive cars or ride bicycles**
- **in Pakistan most businesses are closed on Fridays**
- **Don't discuss about Argentina in Brazil**
- **Colombians like discussions about black Colombian coffee before any business is transacted**

## Tips (3)

- **in Haiti at 8 A.M. and 6 P.M. a bagle is played and a flag raised: stop and stand respectfully**
- **Americans often use baseball expressions in business**
- **Body language: the finger-circle**
  - **America: okay**
  - **Germany / Brazil: considered vulgar or obscene**  
so happened in Brazil where an American gave the okay sign because of concluding a sale -> caused sudden silence and deep freeze
- **Greece / Russia: impolite**
- **Japan: money**
- **southern France: zero or worthless**

**How do other people perceive your behaviour?  
Do a 360° Degree Feedback; see: [www.360-grad-feedback.net](http://www.360-grad-feedback.net)**