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Manners
around the
world

The Belching Compliment - Eastern Culture

Letting a big burp rip after a meal is not considered rude by many people on our planet. In fact, in places like Turkey and Saudi Arabia, it is perfectly acceptable to burp after your meal, which tells the chef you ate plenty and enjoyed every bite. It can even be considered rude NOT to burp in the homes of those who have gone to a lot of effort to make you a great meal. It's a case of don't say it, prove it. And nothing says, "Boy, did I stuff my face," like a big loud belch and a rub of the tummy.

Spit to Say Hello — Sub-Saharan Africa

This infamous scene from *Ace Ventura: When Nature Calls* was inspired by the customs of the Maasai Tribe, located in Kenya. While most countries consider spitting very rude and unhygienic (it could very easily transmit disease), the Maasai Tribe use it as a form of affection, good luck, or reverence. They will spit when they greet each other as a sign of respect. A father will spit on his daughter when she is married, to bring good luck and prosperity to the marriage. And the tribe will spit on newborn babies, to ensure the young child will not be cursed. Yes, to us it seems odd, but it's safe to say that many of our ways will seem equally as bizarre to the Maasai.

Don't Shake With the Left Hand — The Middle East

Although most of us shake with our right hands anyway, it would not be considered terribly rude or offensive to extend the left hand in a greeting. But in the Middle East, this is quite an insult. In this culture, the hands have specific functions. The right hand is used for eating, and the left hand is reserved for wiping after using the bathroom. Knowing this, by offering your left hand, you are offering the hand that, even though clean, is associated with an act that is not. If you ever find yourself in the Middle East, and you're left-handed, make sure you lead with the right hand... every time. And of course, don't eat with your left hand, for the same reasons.

To Tip Is to Offend — Japan

In many countries, tipping is not the common practice that it is in America. In my home country of England, for example, you tip when the service is exceptional, or you genuinely like the person who is providing that service. This is because the wages of staff are not based on tips, and so, they do not depend on them.

However, in Japan, tipping is actually considered to be insulting. By tipping, you are basically saying, "Hey, here's some extra money. Go and get some training, because you need it." If they don't believe you're being rude, they can also be very confused by the extra money, thinking you have overpaid. Whether it's a taxi driver, a server, or a bellhop, don't tip in Japan. It's not good manners.

Never Show the Sole of Your Shoe — Arab Culture

You may remember an incident involving former President George W. Bush and Muntadar al-Zeidi, in which the latter threw his shoe at "Dubya." For many of us, the response was one right out of Austin Powers. "Who throws a shoe, for goodness sake?" But, in Arab culture, it was a significant show of disdain. Showing someone the sole of your shoe is highly insulting, be it sitting with one foot perched on your knee, or reclining with your feet facing your host. The shoe is considered unclean, especially the sole, which is why it must be removed before entering places of worship, homes, and other buildings.

Slurp Your Food to Express Delight — China

Noodle dishes are popular everywhere, but how to show your enjoyment of them varies. In Western culture, we eat as silently as possible. Making any kind of noise is considered rude to those around us.

In China, it's the opposite. If you are greeted with a delicious noodle meal — anything from ramen to laksa — you should slurp for all you're worth. It may even seem difficult to do at first, but it's considered a great compliment to the chef who prepared your meal. Slurping is the equivalent of saying, "This is absolutely delicious. My compliments to the chef," after your first bite.

Avoid the Salt Shaker — Egypt

The chances are, you won't find one on your table anyway. But if you feel the need to ask for salt, you may want to prepare for some mean looks coming in your direction. Asking for salt is telling the chef that he or she didn't season the dish correctly, and you are now going to right that wrong. You may as well slap the host in the face and say, "This tastes awful."

Never Fill Your Own Glass — Japan

Here, as in most countries, you pour your own drink when you're thirsty. In Japan, this is considered greedy, narcissistic, and even anti-social. In other words, you are being incredibly rude by **pouring** your beer, wine, or sake into your own glass. Instead, it is proper to pour for other people at the table first, and they will in turn reciprocate the gesture. If you finish your glass before others do, simply top them off, and you will get the same treatment.

Be Late, Be Polite — Venezuela

As someone who tries to get to my destination a few minutes ahead of time, this one baffles me. Being late is something I personally consider rude and selfish; you are literally wasting people's time.

However, this is not the case in Venezuela. If you show up on time, or early, you are looked upon as being much too eager; or in the case of an event with food and drink being served, much too greedy. You should plan to arrive 15-20 minutes after the event is scheduled to begin. Unless, of course, it's something like a concert or funeral.

The "OK" Sign Is Not Okay — Germany, South America, Turkey

"How are you doing?" is a question that can often be answered with the okay sign: touching your forefinger and thumb together to represent the letter "O." However, in some countries, this gesture is the height of bad manners, and could get you into a physical altercation. It can be seen as a sign that represents the anus, or it's as insulting as flipping the bird is here. Specifically in Turkey, it is a sign that tells someone they are gay, and not in a nice way.

Vocabulary

1. Belching – emit gas noisily from the stomach through the mouth.
2. Tip – a sum of money given to someone as a reward for their services.
3. Sole – the undersurface of a person's foot.
4. Sign (seem) – an object, quality, or event whose presence or occurrence indicates the probable presence or occurrence of something else.
5. Eager – wanting to do or have something very much.
6. Season - add salt, herbs, pepper, or other spices to (food).
7. Pour - flow rapidly in a steady stream.