

## Cities etiquette quiz

<http://www.economist.com/diversions/quiz.cfm/citiesetiquettequiz>

**1. Maintaining your *bella figura*—showing your best face—matters when doing business in Milan. This extends to:**

- a. Being imaginative about your salary (double it) and your position (promote yourself one rung up the ladder)
- b. Mildly putting down your rivals whenever you get the chance
- c. Wearing a two-piece suit, even for casual drinks at a bar
- d. Never apologising for being late or failing to return a phone call or e-mail

**2. How should you greet a business colleague in Singapore?**

- a. By bowing politely
- b. Shake hands, but more softly and for longer than in the West
- c. With a hug
- d. With a single flower (though not a pink one)

**3. At some point during a stay in Berlin, you'll probably have to drink alcohol. When doing this it's important to remember:**

- a. Not to drink until everyone has raised glasses together
- b. To drain your glass (or risk insulting your host)
- c. To toast the most senior person present
- d. Not to drink spirits before dinner, unless you want everyone to think you are an alcoholic

**4. How important is the social element to deal-making in Mexico City?**

- a. Essential. Work on developing a good relationship with an associate before expecting anything else
- b. Not very. A good grasp of Spanish is much more useful
- c. Helpful. A few trips to the "table dance" (strip club) will break down barriers
- d. Not at all. Mexicans are very private and will regard any questions about their family or close friends as prying

**5. At a meeting in Tokyo, a contact presents you with his *meishi* or business card. What do you do?**

- a. Pass the card to any colleagues present before pocketing it
- b. Study it hard and then give it back to its owner (the card will be returned to you on parting)
- c. Put it in the breast/hip pocket of your jacket (never your trouser pocket)
- d. Leave the card in front of you (putting it away is a signal that the meeting is over)

**6. Is a business trip to Buenos Aires in November a good or bad idea, and why?**

- a. Good. A survey of Argentine businessmen found that 60% thought November the best month for making deals
- b. Bad. It's the height of summer and the whole city will have shut down
- c. Good. The polo season will be in full swing and everyone will be in town
- d. Bad. Business owners will be rushing to complete their tax returns

**7. When visiting a London pub, you'd be advised not to:**

- a. Sit down, unless you are female (it's considered bad manners)
- b. Buy a round of drinks (tight-fisted Brits prefer everyone to buy their own)
- c. Order a glass of the house red or white wine, unless you like drinking vinegar
- d. Smoke. It's now illegal in most pubs and restaurants

**8. In Paris, kissing someone three times when greeting him or her is:**

- a. A signal that you are gay
- b. Perfectly acceptable if he or she is more than an acquaintance
- c. Considered a vulgar habit of the *Midi* (France's southern region)
- d. Acceptable if that person is female, but otherwise not

**9. Attending a meeting in Dubai wearing a *dish-dasha* (a crisp white ankle-length shift) and *gutra* (head cloth) is likely to:**

- a. Draw criticism, as it is illegal for foreigners to wear traditional Muslim clothing
- b. Win you praise and respect for adhering to local custom
- c. Confuse everyone present, as these items are worn only by the ruling al-Maktoum family
- d. Have no effect: nobody cares who wears what in Dubai anymore

**10. You'd be well advised to avoid presenting clocks as gifts in Hong Kong—they are thought to signify death. Also, steer well clear of:**

- a. Wine. Most Hong Kongers prefer whisky or beer
- b. Biscuits, unless you think the recipient needs to shed a few pounds
- c. Red flowers, which imply sexual attraction
- d. Blankets, which are believed to cause a decline in prosperity

## Cities etiquette quiz

**Maintaining your *bella figura*--showing your best face--matters when doing business in Milan. This extends to:**

Never apologising for being late or failing to return a phone call or e-mail  
(See article: [Milan Business etiquette](#), May 7th 2002)

**How should you greet a business colleague in Singapore?**

Shake hands, but more softly and for longer than in the West  
(See article: [Singapore Business etiquette](#), Jul 6th 2004)

**At some point during a stay in Berlin, you'll probably have to drink alcohol. When doing this it's important to remember:**

Not to drink until everyone has raised glasses together  
(See article: [Berlin Business etiquette](#), Apr 15th 2004)

**How important is the social element to deal-making in Mexico City?**

Essential. Work on developing a good relationship with an associate before expecting anything else  
(See article: [Mexico City Business etiquette](#), Oct 26th 2001)

**At a meeting in Tokyo, a contact presents you with his *meishi* or business card. What do you do?**

Leave the card in front of you (putting it away is a signal that the meeting is over)  
(See article: [Tokyo Business etiquette](#), Jan 28th 2003)

**Is a business trip to Buenos Aires in November a good or bad idea, and why?**

Good. The polo season will be in full swing and everyone will be in town  
(See article: [Buenos Aires Business etiquette](#), Jan 6th 2004)

**When visiting a London pub, you'd be advised not to:**

Order a glass of the house red or white wine, unless you like drinking vinegar  
(See article: [London Business etiquette](#), Feb 21st 2003)

**In Paris, kissing someone three times when greeting him or her is:**

Considered a vulgar habit of the *Midi* (France's southern region)  
(See article: [Paris Business etiquette](#), Jan 14th 2004)

**Attending a meeting in Dubai wearing a *dish-dasha* (a crisp white ankle-length shift) and *gutra* (head cloth) is likely to:**

Draw criticism, as it is illegal for foreigners to wear traditional Muslim clothing  
(See article: [Dubai Business etiquette](#), Sep 2nd 2003)

**You'd be well advised to avoid presenting clocks as gifts in Hong Kong--they are thought to signify death. Also, steer well clear of:**

Blankets, which are believed to cause a decline in prosperity

## Business etiquette - Milan

- Dress and overall appearance are very important: businessmen spend time finding just the right suit, and women are typically decked out in fashionable, feminine outfits and tasteful jewellery. Italians have a tendency to notice shoes straight away—keep yours shiny and in good shape. The same applies to hair, briefcases and ties. It's best not to choose anything too jazzy.

Popular labels include Armani, Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Donna Karan, with briefcases and shoes by Gucci, Fendi, Tod's and possibly Samsonite. Leave your Marks & Spencers at home.

- Business relationships need nurturing. Never refuse an offer of a coffee or a glass of wine. Ask your contacts about their children, spouses, pets, recent holidays and the like. Person-to-person contact goes a long way in Italy.

- An evening drink in one of Milan's many bars is sometimes preferred to a leisurely business lunch in this work-oriented city. But business people often arrange their evenings around both drinks and dinner.

- Milan's most important annual events are the fashion weeks (women's: February/March, September/October; men's: January, June) and the furniture trade fair (April). During these times, cabs, hotel rooms and tables in restaurants can be hard to come by. Book well ahead.

- It is important to maintain your *bella figura*—the Italian expression for showing your best face. This can refer to appearance, but can also mean the ability to get out of a difficult situation with style. Charm, grace and humour are very important at all times. Your colleagues' *bella figura* is equally essential, so tact and diplomacy are at a premium at all stages of negotiations.

- When meeting someone in a formal situation, it is polite to simply state your full name and then shake hands. When saying goodbye after a business meeting, try: "*Arrivederci. Piacere di averla conosciuta*" (Good-bye. Pleased to have met you). *Ciao* is very informal and can sometimes come across as oafish.

- Never blame yourself for being late or failing to return a phone call or e-mail. Instead, politely blame your tardiness on traffic or computer problems. Similarly, don't attack Italian colleagues if they appear to have slipped up. Try instead: "Why, the same thing happened to me yesterday..." The Italian culture of non-accountability runs deep.

- It is acceptable to be five to ten minutes late for an appointment in Milan. If you know that you'll be later

than this, call ahead, giving an accurate estimate of your arrival time.

- A phone conversation or (preferably) face-to-face contact will often prove far more effective than an e-mail or fax. However, e-mail has finally become a part of the daily business routine and can be used with success, depending on who you are corresponding with.

- Now that smoking is illegal in all public places, it has become more-or-less unacceptable in business settings, too. These days, most smokers wait for a break, then head outside to light up.

- Raving about your recent trip to Rome may be met with some scepticism. The Milanese pride themselves on their work ethic and some have a low opinion of the supposed "laziness" of Romans and other southern Italians (though this may depend on political colour). At the same time, there is a tendency to admire the Romans' ability not to let work run their lives.

- Unlike their Roman counterparts, the Milanese can be reserved when it comes to socialising. Formal introductions should precede conversation, though in informal situations you may be expected to introduce yourself. Even at a party, don't expect to make new friends by mingling around the buffet table. It may be up to you to make the effort.

- Italians love to debate. If you have a disagreement, don't simply accept the other person's point or insist on yours. The proper way to proceed is to emphatically agree with the other person's view and then refute it. "Yes, that is a completely valid point, you are right. However..."

- A degree from a four-year college or university bestows the right to be addressed as "Dottore" or "Dottoressa" (though note that *dottore* also refers to a medical doctor). As a foreigner, it is safest to refer to everyone you come across in business dealings by these titles (unless the person is a lawyer, engineer or architect, in which case they are addressed as "Avvocato", "Ingegnere" or "Architetto").

- In formal situations and business dinners, the expression *buon appetito* is often frowned upon and should probably be avoided. However, it is commonly used at more informal meals, between family and friends. After the meal, leave your napkin crumpled up on the table rather than folding it neatly.

- Take care when ordering coffee after a meal; topping off a meal with a frothy cappuccino would be unthinkable to an Italian (read our coffee tips). Ask for an espresso instead.

See also: Useful words and phrases

## Business etiquette - Singapore



Singapore may appear westernised, but Asian etiquette applies in many situations. A high degree of courtesy is expected.

- Handshakes (softer and longer than in the West) are followed immediately by a swap of business cards. Offer your card with both hands, ensuring the name on the card faces the other person. Receive cards with both hands and be sure to look at them with interest. Do not put them away immediately.

- The warm climate means that suits are worn only at the most important business meetings; otherwise, a long-sleeved shirt and tie are the norm. For women, light suits are

customary.

- Business is often conducted over meals or cocktails. Some Singaporeans still arrive late for meals (it is traditionally considered greedy to be prompt). The honoured guest will always arrive last, even if the honour is bred of self-importance. If inviting colleagues to dinner, be aware of dietary restrictions (Muslims do not eat pork; some Buddhists and Hindus do not eat any meat at all).

- Muslim Singaporeans often visit a mosque for an hour on Fridays (between noon and 2pm).

- Western-style assertiveness is often seen as rude. Singaporeans prize the appearance of modesty and seriousness, and they typically play down achievements and successes.

- To avoid losing face, Singaporeans will often avoid saying "no" outright. Body language will often provide more clues than what is actually said.

For more information on business etiquette in Asia, see this article in [Global Executive: When in Singapore](#), October 3rd 2001.

## Business etiquette - Berlin

- Like many Germans, Berliners tend to be earnest and straightforward. It is best to say exactly what you mean and to keep attempts at humour out of business meetings. Irony can be taken the wrong way.
- This straightforwardness does not mean pushiness, however. Germans are consensus-oriented, and prefer to arrive at agreement through (sometimes lengthy) discussion to avoid later misunderstanding. The American and British tendency to barrel through seemingly simple business can be considered rude.
- On the other hand, Berliners are known for their big mouths (*Schnauze*) and can be quick to ridicule anything they see as pompous. Don't be aghast at this acerbic wit, and tread carefully when responding.
- Always try to be on time or, if possible, early to appointments, and arrange for meetings or interviews well in advance.
- Germans like to be called by titles, such as doctor or professor, and will prove much friendlier if you appear to appreciate their educational credentials.
- Female executives should know that German boardrooms remain bastions of male power. Many male executives have little or no experience of women as professional equals.
- Shaking hands is customary when meeting a business partner, and again when saying goodbye. It is usual to keep it up at every future meeting.
- Do not be offended if a German appears reserved about his or her private life. Many Germans see a stark division between the public and private spheres, and can be slow to open up. Control your urge to talk about last night's football match; many business people here consider chat about sport the preserve of the uneducated.
- It is considered impolite to start drinking before everyone has raised glasses together, a procedure you usually repeat with each round. (According to German superstition, if you don't look into another person's eyes when clinking glasses, seven years of bad sex will follow.) Sticking to non-alcoholic drinks during the day is acceptable, but you will be expected to have at least a sip of wine at an important dinner.
- For a truly unique Berlin drinking experience, try a *Berliner Weisse*, which is a beer with syrup added—either deep red (raspberry) or virulent green (woodruff)—often served in a large glass. It's more palatable than it sounds.
- Non-smokers who make a point of their rights are still considered a little gauche.

## Business etiquette - Mexico

- Mexicans prize good manners. It is considered proper to say "*Buenos días*" (Good morning/Good day), "*Buenas tardes*" (Good afternoon) and "*Buenas noches*" (Good evening/Good night) to perfect strangers. Say "*Con permiso*" (Excuse me) when pushing past someone, leaving a group of people or even leaving a lift. If someone says it to you, reply "*Propio*". Often strangers will wish "*Bon appetit*"—or "*Probecho*"—to fellow diners when leaving a restaurant.

- Good manners also mean that a Mexican will sometimes be evasive to avoid disappointing. "Maybe", "probably", "I think so" and "I'll have to check" often mean "no". "I'll call you at 6 o'clock" means what it says, but "I'll call you" means "Don't expect to hear from me." It is wise to reconfirm business appointments the day before.

- When someone joins a group everyone should be introduced, even if the newcomer only stopped to say hello to one person. When greeting each other, two women or a man and a woman usually kiss on one cheek, sometimes even on the first introduction.

- Business wear is fairly formal, even if the casual Friday is making slight headway.

- Try to be on time, but don't be annoyed if other people are late. An extra 15 minutes hardly counts. Traffic is the usual excuse.

- Lunches can last for hours, though younger associates are liable to be more time-conscious. Allow two hours, at least. 2pm is the absolute earliest socially permissible time to start lunch—as late as 4pm is not uncommon. Social drinking is also widespread, and you can expect a boozy lunch to celebrate closing a deal.

- Attempts to speak Spanish are very much appreciated, even when bungled. Serious deals are made in Spanish, so hire an interpreter if you're unable to do the job yourself. See our [useful phrases](#).

- The social element of deal-making is essential here; work on developing a good relationship with an associate before expecting anything else. Questions about someone's family are appreciated (family life is very important here), and associates appreciate invitations to restaurants.

- Professional titles—doctor, lawyer, engineer—are very important. People will often be referred to as "*licenciado so-and-so*", "*ingeniero so-and-so*", "*abogado so-and-so*", and so on. (Replace the 'o' with an 'a' when referring to a woman.)

- It is useful to have business cards printed in English on one side and Spanish on the other; consider having this done before arriving in Mexico.



## Business etiquette – Tokyo

- Be cautious about calling someone by his or her first name—first names are often restricted to family and very close friends. In general, it's best to couple someone's last name with "san" (for example, Koizumi-san)—this works for both men and women. Having said this, there are cases, these days, where Japanese first names are used without hesitation.

- Don't be unnerved by silences—pauses in conversation are an important part of communication in Japan.

- Always be prompt. The best rule is to turn up early for appointments, but only to present yourself at the specified time.

- Don't raise your voice; brash westerners are apt to be perceived as intimidating and gauche. Speak slightly more slowly than you would normally do, but not obviously so.

- Traditional business attire—dark suits and white shirts—is expected, certainly for the older generation. In recent years, however, ties and jackets are being discarded by the young entrepreneurs of Tokyo in favour of black T-shirts and neutral-shade trousers. During off-hours (including weekends), smart-casual dress is the best rule—don't descend into sheer scruffiness.

- Don't be unnerved if someone falls asleep during a conference—this is not unusual. It is, however, unsettling. If you are giving a speech, make it clear at the outset that questions will be accepted afterwards—miraculously, this tends to keep audience members on their toes.

- Don't expect an immediate response to anything. Decisions are usually made collectively, and answers typically take much longer than in western companies. Once a decision is taken in Japan, however, the machine rolls forward smoothly and action is speedy.

### Yes and no

Don't get confused by what Japanese mean by "yes". "Yes" (*hai*) does not translate to "Yes, I agree with you," or "Yes, that is what I am going to do." More often it means, "Yes, I hear what you are saying." This can lead to confusion. Japanese communication stresses harmony and the word "no" (*ie*) is deemed overly blunt in certain contexts.

### Bowing

Don't be overly worried about bowing: these days many Japanese businessmen and women shake hands. It is best to wait and follow the lead of your host: if someone does bow to you, respond by bowing back.

### Business cards

In a culture where employees often introduce themselves with their company name first ("I am Sony's Suzuki"), *meishi* are a big deal. The exchange of business cards is a ritual: Japanese people offer their card using one or two hands thrust forward, with the name clearly visible and the right way up from the

recipient's perspective. Or at least that is the theory. The one golden rule, though, is to have a *meishi* with you at all times, ready to give out when necessary—to be without a *meishi* at a meeting is a disaster. If someone gives you their *meishi* and you do not return the gesture, you are signalling that you are not interested in pursuing the relationship. During meetings, keep the card in front of you; putting it away is a signal that the meeting is over.

*Meishi* should ideally be produced from the breast/hip pocket of your jacket, not from your trouser pockets. It's considered good manners to have the information printed in Japanese on the reverse side. All big hotels have business centres where the staff will advise on translation. Titles are very important in Japan and should be carefully considered in advance.

### Blowing one's nose

Blowing one's nose violently in public is regarded as off-putting by some Japanese—which may appear odd in a city in which men can be found loudly coughing up and spitting out phlegm—but a quiet sniff into a hanky is tolerable.

### Gift-giving

Owing to recent corruption scandals in the business world—and the slowdown in the economy since 1990—Japan's new gift-giving sensibility is "less is more". Don't give anything too elaborate or expensive. Best to stick with nicely wrapped, fancy name-brands (like Harrods and Tiffany's), since thought and presentation are at least as important as the gift itself. That said, gifts should not be treated casually or forgotten. Remember, too, that gifts have a place in Japanese business life that they do not have in the West.

### Shoes

Shoes are not worn inside Japanese houses or temples. There will be an assortment of slippers for guests to choose from. Leave your shoes (toes pointing towards the exit) at the designated spot and enter the main room. When entering a *tatami* room, remove your slippers (on *tatami* it's socks or bare feet only). Shoe incidents (where someone accidentally walks off in the wrong pair) are a constant hazard. If you've got big western feet (duly shod with large clodhoppers that no Japanese will claim), you should be safe.

### Taxis

When entering a taxi, the most important person sits in the middle with an acolyte on either side. Never open or close a taxi door—the driver will take care of that.

### Taking friends out

Once you have established a relationship with a Japanese businessman (this takes time, but rarely more than a couple of meetings if you're from overseas), you may decide to reciprocate their hospitality and treat your friend to a night out—assuming the other party has made the first move, as is the normal order of events with visitors. Bars can be very expensive, so choose your bar well. The culture of throwing away several thousand dollars in a

Ginza hostess bar has all but gone by the board. These days, favoured bars of the type named in this guide cost a fraction of the old Ginza horror shows, and are much more fun to go to.

See your guests off properly by standing to attention—almost—and waiting for their taxi to leave. Make it clear how much you appreciated your chief guest's company. He will wind down the window and wave at you. Thus, formalities assert themselves at the end of an evening. If not, something has gone wrong—unless, of course, everyone has imbibed a bit too much.

See also our [Eating and drinking](#) tips.

### **What to avoid...**

"Refrain from pointing" is the old rule but, these days, young Japanese—especially women, it seems—like sticking out their fingers and pointing. Another rule that has gone by the board is the eye-escaping rule—never look at anyone and never bump into them. All of that is no more—least of all when a party is rolling forward of an evening, in which case almost anything may be acceptable.

Note that, in daytime situations, the Japanese definition of personal space is still a shade longer and wider than its western counterpart, which should be taken into account, even in the subway (except during the infamous rush-hours, when all rules break down).



## Business etiquette – Buenos Aires

- The Argentine attitude can be quite aggressive when it comes to business. You may find that short-term thinking prevails. Exercise caution, and don't trust deals agreed on a handshake. A signed contract is the best thing to rely on.
- Contacts are crucial. *Porteños* (residents of Buenos Aires) tend to place great emphasis on social connections, and knowing somebody in common can go a long way in building a relationship. This can even extend to hiring staff; it is not unusual for an employee to get hired because of who, rather than what, they know.
- When greeting a man, shake his hand; when greeting a woman a single cheek-to-cheek kiss is usual. Men who become friends, or younger, casual business contacts may sometimes kiss each other on the cheek.
- If speaking Spanish, most conversations are conducted using the informal *vos* form, but *Usted* is more appropriate with older or more senior contacts.
- Argentines tend to start and finish work late—the rush hour to the wealthier neighbourhoods runs from 5.30pm to 9pm. Although business meetings can sometimes begin at 8.30am, it is not unusual to be unable to find someone in their office before 10am.
- Punctuality is not overvalued in Buenos Aires. A 9am meeting is unlikely to start much before 9.15. Conferences or larger meetings are even worse. As a visitor you should err on the side of caution, but be prepared to wait. Similarly, if invited for dinner at 9pm, showing up half an hour late is fine, unless the host specifically requests punctuality (in which case arrive around ten past).
- Stylish attire is the norm; this is not a jeans and T-shirt culture. Women tend to dress in a very feminine manner; high heels and short skirts are quite acceptable.
- Late December to early February can be unpleasantly hot and humid in Buenos Aires, and January is the worst time to come for business, as the whole city shuts down for the Argentine summer. Many key decision-makers will be at their beach pads in Punta del Este in Uruguay—Buenos Aires's version of the Hamptons. In November, by contrast, the city hums with activity.
- Appearance is highly prized. Your contacts will appreciate being invited to the latest "in" restaurant for lunch, and will be impressed with your local knowledge.
- Chances are your business contacts will speak English, but it is considerate to have a few words of Spanish at your disposal. As everywhere in Latin America, Spanglish abounds. See our list of useful words and phrases.
- With one psychologist or psychoanalyst for every 164 inhabitants, Buenos Aires is possibly the most psychoanalysed city in the world. One neighbourhood in the Palermo district has even been dubbed "Villa Freud".

## **Business etiquette - London**

- London is a multicultural city. It is worth finding out where your contact is from. You are quite as likely to be dealing with an Indian or an Australian as you are with a born-and-bred Londoner.
- Business cards are typically exchanged at the end of a meeting. But it is not unusual for a Brit to forget about them entirely. If your contact fumbles around for his or her card, or fails to produce one, don't take it personally.
- The British tend to be punctual, and meetings generally follow the Anglo-Saxon norm, with brief chit-chat swiftly followed by a focused, action-oriented discussion.
- E-mails perfectly suit the famous British reserve. In general, they are promptly responded to and are often the preferred method of communication, at least at the outset. As a relationship strengthens, and certainly if complex negotiations are involved, expect face-to-face meetings and telephone conversations.
- The strongest relationships are forged after work—be that in a pub or at an informal evening meal. The line between work and private life is not as clearly delineated as in America, and the British tend to socialise with colleagues quite regularly. Drunken behaviour on a Friday evening will be laughed off the following Monday, and in some cases is quite the norm.
- The woes of public transport are a sure-fire way of reviving flagging conversation. London's motorists now have to pay an £8 congestion charge to drive into the city. Your contacts will be sure to have an opinion on whether the experiment is working.
- A business lunch can just as easily mean a quick sandwich and coffee as a slap-up meal in a smart restaurant. Breakfast meetings are rare. Most Brits subscribe to Oscar Wilde's claim that "only dull people are interesting at breakfast."
- London's top restaurants are expensive (£100 a head is not unheard of). Furthermore, an increasing number insist on taking credit card details before accepting a booking.
- Midday drinking has declined, but it is still normal to have a glass of wine or a beer, with food or without.
- Likewise, smoking has fallen off dramatically. Even so, many still exercise their right to light up. Not all restaurants have non-smoking sections, and in some pubs and bars the haze of smoke can be uncomfortable.
- Table manners are keenly observed as a subtle sign of good breeding. Never talk with your mouth full; never reach across the table; do not wave cutlery around or yell "I'm done" to the waiter.
- The British are less politically correct than their American counterparts. Wittiness can still mean an agility with sexual innuendo, with a pint in one hand and a cigarette in the other.
- When in a pub, do not expect table service, except if you are seated in the restaurant area. And don't tip the bar staff unless they bring the drinks and bill over to you. When in a pub, do not expect table service, except if you are seated in the restaurant area. And don't tip the bar staff unless they bring the drinks and bill over to you

## Business etiquette - Paris

France is at heart a very formal society. The American habit of being on first-name terms from the start tends to shock. When in doubt, err on the side of formality.

- Parisians have an exaggerated reputation (among the French, as well as visitors) for rudeness. The trick is to engage them in the formal ritual of French politeness—be sure to say *bonjour* (good day), *merci* (thank you) and *au revoir* (goodbye). It works wonders, especially in shops, even if it does turn the purchase of a baguette into a five-minute social exchange.
- That said, some expats living in Paris insist that local rudeness is a real blight on their otherwise idyllic lifestyle.
- In a business setting it is always advisable to dress up rather than down. Senior businessmen (and politicians) are invariably immaculate. So, too, are the few women who have defied France's still-prevalent male chauvinism and reached senior positions. Few people have yet discovered "dress-down Fridays".
- In business settings, kissing on both cheeks as a form of greeting is confined only to men and women who know each other reasonably well—and have a roughly equal status. The safest bet for business visitors is to shake hands. If the visit is to the factory floor, the workers will expect to have their hands shaken, too.
- Be careful not to foist on to your hosts "Anglo-Saxon" (the favourite French term for the Americans and British) notions of what is "politically correct": you may be viewed as naive, arrogant or simply weird. It is considered entirely natural to pat someone on the back, or have some other innocent form of physical contact in the office.
- Rather than labour steadily throughout the day, Parisians tend to condense their work into short periods of time. Thus, do not expect your contact to be at their desk when you are trying to reach them (and certainly not on Friday afternoons). The same rule applies to the seasons. May is a quiet month, due to a glut of bank holidays, and in August, *les grands départs* to the countryside ensure that the capital is virtually empty.
- The French notion of time-keeping is far from intuitive. The current trend is to begin business meetings on time (although there are frequent lapses). So, too, for lunch on a work day (not least because restaurants get annoyed otherwise).
- A private dinner is entirely different: it is simply rude to be on time. Don't turn up at 8pm for an 8pm dinner and expect anyone to be pleased to see you. Most Parisians won't arrive until 9pm. Conversely, it would be rude to overstay your welcome: once one couple leaves a private dinner party, the others will follow suit. This means that most private dinners begin at 8.30-9.00pm and are over by midnight.
- Grabbing a sandwich for lunch at one's desk confirms Parisians' worst stereotypes of Anglo-Saxons. Lunch, a sit-down affair, is treated as a real break from the office, and conversation over food is rarely work-related.
- To refuse wine at lunch would be permissible, but seen as slightly odd. To refuse wine at a dinner could be considered rude. Whatever the circumstances, it is extremely bad form to drink too much. Equally, it is still bad form to object to a post-prandial cigarette or cigar.
- Cigarette smoking is definitely on the decline—though reality mocks the law that for several years has required restaurants to have non-smoking areas.
- In a private setting, a small gift for your hosts will be welcome, as will a note of thanks afterwards. Flowers or champagne are best (err on the side of quality). Except among close friends, wine is a bad idea since the host will feel insulted if your wine is cheap or embarrassed if it puts his to shame.

## Business etiquette - Dubai

- Dubai is very much a family business. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, the ruler, is often referred to (privately) as the "CEO of Dubai PLC." For practical purposes, the Dubai Government and al-Maktoum family are interchangeable.

Dubai International Airport and the Emirates airline group are entirely owned by the government—as are such thriving projects as Dubai Internet City, Jebel Ali Free Zone and Dubai Aluminium. Despite its heavy role in business, the government makes life easy for private enterprise, slashing red tape and offering generous tax and ownership incentives to foreign investors.

- The best time to visit is from December to March, during which you can avoid the sweltering summer (May-September).
- The biggest discomfort you are likely to experience in summer is not the heat, but the humidity. Make sure you drink lots of water and protect yourself from the sun. Hats, sunscreen and sunglasses are strongly recommended, and it is best to stay indoors or in the shade during peak hours (11am-2pm).
- Paradoxically, summer is the easiest time to catch a cold. Newcomers can be spotted by their coughs and sneezes as they move between the steamy streets and the city's fierce air-conditioning.
- Alcohol is served only in the restaurants, bars and nightclubs of Dubai's four- and five-star hotels. It is illegal to consume it elsewhere. Non-Muslim residents must acquire a licence, issued by the police, to consume alcohol at home. Teetotal Muslims are rarely offended if their companions drink; but it is wise to follow the lead of your host. Emiratis tend not to drink, especially in public, but the Lebanese are great boozers (Lebanon's Bekaa Valley produces some excellent wines).

### Doing business

- Most local men wear a *dish-dasha* (a crisp white ankle-length shift) and *ghutra* (head cloth). Many women wear an *abaya* (floor-length robe) in public. It is illegal for foreigners to don traditional Muslim clothing. Conservative business suits are standard for male visitors.
- If you are rushing between appointments during the summer, carry a spare shirt. A change of three shirts in one day is not uncommon when temperatures reach 50° Celsius.
- Business meetings often begin with leisurely chit-chat. The weather is a favourite talking point, as is bad driving, and what a wonderful place Dubai is. Women should expect to be asked about their spouses and children.
- Business cards are essential; always carry a small stack with you. They are usually handed out at the beginning of the meeting, after shaking hands.
- Expect to be addressed as "Mr John" or "Miss Julia"—this is standard practice in the United Arab Emirates, and your contacts will likely refer to each other as "Mr Abdul" and so forth.
- Personal connections (*wasta* in Arabic) are important, but not to the exclusion of those who are without them. Places like Dubai Internet City make great play of the fact that once you are in, staff will use their *wasta* to open doors for you.
- Dubai has a large Indian and Pakistani expat community. Hindi and Urdu are as widely spoken as Arabic and English. (See our list of [Useful words and phrases](#).)
- Entertaining at home is unusual. Your contacts will probably arrange an evening meal in a hotel restaurant, possibly followed by a visit to an Arabic nightclub.

**Fridays and Ramadan**

- Do not arrange appointments on Fridays, the Muslim day of prayer and rest. Avoid making calls between 2pm and 5pm on weekdays, when many Arabs take a siesta.
- During Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar (based on sightings of particular phases of the moon), Muslims fast from dawn until dusk. Working hours are shortened: many firms, including western ones, close at 1pm. Ramadan regresses by about 12 days every year.
- Normal life resumes after dinner during Ramadan, and shops stay open until after midnight. Business travellers should make the most of the networking opportunities in the *majlis*, tents set up by Dubai's movers and shakers (usually from 10pm until 2am). An invitation to smoke *shisha* and drink Turkish coffee in a *majli* can be a great way to close a deal, though women travellers should note that it remains very much a male preserve.

See our [Women travellers](#) section.

## Business etiquette – Hong Kong

- Even in Hong Kong's warm climate, formal business attire is required unless you are advised otherwise. Jackets and ties are also expected in many restaurants and clubs; this requirement is always clearly stipulated and politely enforced.

- A handshake is the most common form of greeting, followed immediately by the swapping of business cards, which should be offered and received with both hands. If possible, have cards printed with Chinese on one side and English on the other.



- Make sure you have a plentiful supply of business cards on hand—you will need them. Cards are exchanged at an alarming rate, and it's bad form to run out; bring at least twice as many as you would take on a business trip anywhere else. Failing to offer a business card suggests you don't want to make the person's acquaintance or—worse—that your own status is unimportant. Even on social occasions, you'll see people feverishly swapping cards.

- When receiving a business card, make a show of examining it, then put it into your card case or place it on the table (if you are seated at one). It is rude to stuff it straight in a pocket.

- Most people should be addressed with their title and family name. If a person does not have a professional title (chairman, president, doctor, etc), then simply use "Mr", "Madam", "Mrs" or "Miss", plus the family name.

- Chinese names appear in a different order to those in the West. The family name is followed by a generational name and then a given name. The generational and given names are usually separated by a hyphen. Some Chinese people use the initials of their generational and given names, hence Lee Cheng-kwan can be known as C K Lee or Mr Lee. However, many people adopt an English first name or nickname to make it easier for westerners to address them. Some of these adopted names are a little odd, others downright inappropriate. Try not to look too surprised if you are introduced to a "Landrover Chan", an "Ivan Ho" or a "Hitler Wong"—these names all exist here.

- Smoking is still widespread in China; if you have a meeting with someone from the mainland, do not be surprised if they light up halfway through.

- As on the mainland, a married Chinese woman usually retains her maiden name and will not use her husband's name at all.

- In Hong Kong business culture a person's reputation and social standing rest on the concept of "face". Causing embarrassment or confrontation through loss of composure, even unintentionally, constitutes a "loss of face" and can be disastrous for business negotiations. Raised voices, or any signs of aggression, are strictly taboo. Conversely, you can "give face" through courtesy and showing respect. Punctuality is very important and is seen as a gesture of "giving face".

### Gift-giving

The important practice of giving and receiving gifts also involves "face". As in the exchange of business cards, it should be done with both hands. But unwrapping the gift immediately implies in the recipient greediness and impatience, and might cause embarrassment if the gift turns out to be a poor choice.

Gifts to avoid include clocks, as they connote death, and blankets, which are believed to cause a decline in prosperity. It's best to stick to fancy brand names, as presentation counts for a lot.

At Chinese New Year, it is customary to give *Lai See*—a red envelope containing money (usually HK\$20)—to children and non-governmental personnel you deal with on a regular basis. You should enclose new bills, with even numbers to denote good luck and prosperity.

See also: [Eating and drinking in Hong Kong](#).