



International Event Protocol...
What In The World Do I Do?
A Brief Overview

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*(23 years of amazing experiences, deep breaths, headaches,
curse words, caffeine, and bruises)*

I have a guest speaker from a foreign country attending my event...HELP!

- *What Do I Do?*
- *What Do I Say?*
- *How Do I Say It?*
- *What Should I Know?*
- *Where do I start?*



Confucius say,

“All people are the same.

***It’s only their habits that are
different.”***

Remember:

- This quote serves as a reminder that in a global economy, cross-culture awareness is no longer an option.
- It is vital that every contact with international guests be a positive one.
- This goal can be achieved by researching and understanding cultural preferences and sensitivities in advance.



Dozens of blunders have resulted when event managers have been unprepared for international customs, courtesies and the expectations of international guests.

We can't cover EVERYTHING during this brief session. But, we'll review a few basic areas.

Do not embarrass you, your organization or the guest. Focus on:

- **R**esearch the background and customs
- **E**ducate yourself in basic protocol and etiquette
- **S**afety and security for your international guest
- **P**recedence (priority/importance) of guest is #1
- **E**vent design is respectful of guest
- **C**reate a plan and share it with guest's representative
- **T**each the basics to your staff and all involved

Discuss the above points as a group.

YOU are responsible for your guest!

As you develop your event plan, it is important to remember:

- What country they are from (Duh!)
- How to pronounce their name
- Title, Rank or Status
- How to welcome them
- Customs
- Who speaks directly to them
- Communication style to use (personal space, gestures, etc.)
- Know their holidays
- Know their foods/drinks
- Know their clothing customs
- Know basic gift giving customs

Briefly discuss the points above. Why know this?



Welcome!

The professional event manager knows that the word “*Welcome!*” is an essential part of the guest experience at any event. Making an effort to be able to say it in the guest’s own language is especially impressive.

Benvenuto!	(Italian)	Bien venue!	(French)
Bienvenidos!	(Spanish)	Dobro pozhalovat!	(Russian)
Fun ying!	(Cantonese)	G’Day!	(Australian)
Hos geldin!	(Turkish)	Huan ying!	(Mandarin)
Kali meta!	(Greek)	Kwaribu!	(Swahili)
Laipni ludzam!	(Latvian)	Sabah al kher!	(Arabic)
Shalom!	(Hebrew)	Urseo oh se yo!	(Korean)
Velkomst	(Danish)	Willkommen!	(German)
Youkoso!	(Japanese)		

Here We Go... Around The World In 59 Minutes!



A Basic Reference Using General Guidelines

Latin America

(Mexico, Central.South America and Spanish Caribbean)

Culture/Customs

- It is best to refer to yourself as North American and your country is the U.S., not as an “American” or “America.”
- Approximately 98% of the population is Catholic. Be sensitive to religious festivals and observances

Greeting

- Be warm and friendly with a gentle handshake (do not squeeze)
- Address guest by title and surname. Not first name, unless told.

Body Language/Clothing

- Latins stand close when talking. “Comfort Zone” isn’t observed.
- Don’t use OK sign (considered unprofessional, rude)
- Don’t serve wine with left hand in Chile.

Latin America

(Mexico, Central.South America and Spanish Caribbean)

Business Practices

- Attitude towards time and schedules is relaxed. But you should always be on time.
- Avoid discussing foreign debt.
- Number 13 is considered very unlucky.

Food/Beverage

- Strong coffee is normal
- Main meal is mid-day.
- Evening social events usually start late (9 or 10pm)

Gifts

- Monetary value of item isn't as important as the thought
- Avoid white lilies or gift wrappings in purple, black or yellow (death/funerals).

Pacific Rim

(Islands in Pacific Ocean, Australia and New Zealand)

Culture/Customs

- A diverse makeup of islands combining traditional tribal customs and those nations that later settled there. Blending old and new.
- People are respectful, warm and friendly with concern for others.
- Australia and New Zealand retain many old British customs, however, do not compare them or link them together in identity.

Greeting

- Basic, firm handshake
- When introduced to women, wait for her to offer hand first
- Australians and New Zealanders use first names soon after meeting

Body Language/Clothing

- Avoid pointing feet toward center of room when sitting cross legged
- Never wink at a woman, even to express friendship

Pacific Rim

(Islands in Pacific Ocean, Australia and New Zealand)

Business Practices

- Minimize rank in business dealings and prefer equality
- Sensitive to issues of race. Avoid this topic
- Be punctual, but understand that meetings are conducted at a slower pace
- Islanders do not like “intellectual show offs”

Food/Beverage

- Many foods are eaten with fingers. However, table manners do exist.

Gifts

- Small tokens are more appreciated and less embarrassing
- Gifts are not opened upon presentation

Far East

(Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, S. Korea, N. Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippine Islands, and Singapore)

Culture/Customs

- Each region has it's own language, race, religion, history, art, etc. and should be acknowledged as so
- Politeness, humility, loyalty, grace, and patience are valued virtues
- Style is just as important as substance. How something is done, is respected as much as what is done.
- Harmony & Peace are part of Japanese culture. Saying "No" is rude
- Personal/honor are extremely important. Do not embarrass an Asian.

Greeting

- Simple, not firm handshake
- Americans can return a bow with a slight bend of the waist
- Koreans may use both hands to greet you
- In Thailand, they may greet you with closed palms (as if praying)
- Chinese and Koreans usually have 3 names. The first one = family name.

Far East

(Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, S. Korea, N. Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippine Islands, and Singapore)

Body Language/Clothing

- Small details are noticed. You'll be judged on first impressions
- Asians are not “touchy” people. Do not make casual body contact.
- Long or frequent eye contact is considered rude and intimidating
- Thais and Malaysians do not want to be touched on their heads
- Do not use the foot to point or show the sole of your shoe

Business Practices

- It is considered impolite to start talking business right away
- Asians like to be prepared and do not like surprises in business
- American methods are considered “pushy” – take time
- Age and seniority are highly respected
- Religion plays an important role in behavior, lifestyle and business

Far East

(Japan, China, Taiwan, Vietnam, S. Korea, N. Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippine Islands, and Singapore)

Food/Beverage

- Wait for the guest to start eating/drinking
- Asians consider drunkenness rude and embarrassing
- Be prepared to toast throughout the meal
- Business is not discussed during a meal
- They do not have cocktail hour. Seating upon arrival is normal.
- At the conclusion of a meal, everyone leaves promptly.

Gifts

- The way a gift is presented is often more important than the gift itself
- Present gift with both hands and bow slightly to recipient

Middle East & Arab World

(Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Yeman Arab Republic, Iran, and Iraq))

Culture/Customs

- There is no single Arab race or nationality. Each country has it's own identity, which calls for study of history, culture, religion, etc.
- The most important element to keep in mind is religion. Islam dominates every part of life.
- Western ways are threatening and misunderstood by Arabs
- Approach new acquaintances in formal and reserved steps
- Great respect is shown to age, which takes precedence over rank
- Most Arabs speak some English and many speak French & German
- The most holy period in the Muslim calendar is Ramadan. During this month long observance, Muslims are forbidden to eat, smoke or drink from dawn to dusk. Also, no work is done after noon.

Middle East & Arab World

(Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen Arab Republic, Iran, and Iraq)

Greeting

- Handshake greeting, sometimes with both hands at introduction and departure
- Arab wives are not introduced and do not shake hands
- Most females are restricted in actions and rank as per Islam tradition. They hold second class status.
- In Egypt, however, customs regarding women are more liberal. Introductions and shaking hands is permitted if initiated by the guest.
- Islamic custom demands that everything stops for prayer. The faithful kneel and pray for a few minutes during this time. You can simply sit quietly and wait.
- Rank & position are very important. Use title and last name.

Middle East & Arab World

(Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen Arab Republic, Iran, and Iraq)

Body Language/Clothing

- Arab society is a “touchy” society. Males sometimes hold another male’s hand to discuss business
- Arabs stand close together and do not require “personal space”
- They like to look into people’s eyes watching for responses
- Use your right hand for eating, drinking, and accepting anything. The left hand is used only for bodily functions and is “unclean”
- Do not gesture to someone pointing a finger – it is rude
- Showing the sole of your shoe is impolite
- Dress conservatively and women should be modest at all times

Business Practices

- Work week is Saturday to mid day Thursday
- Meetings are relaxed and usually involve discussing non business matters

Middle East & Arab World

(Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Gulf States, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Yeman Arab Republic, Iran, and Iraq)

Food/Beverage

- When drinking tea or coffee, drink it and hand it back to the server, if possible. Do not place the cup on the table
- Never clean your plate of all food - this shows that you're still hungry
- Muslims do not eat pork, nor any animal that is a scavenger (pig, goat, crab, lobster) Neither do they eat meat from cloven hooves, not foods cooked in oils from any of these.
- Beverages and foods cooked or processed in alcohol are forbidden

Gifts

- Giving and receiving of gifts is very important and shows bonding
- Do not give an item that reflects pet animals or the human figure
- Liquor is a forbidden gift by Islamic Law

Israel

Culture/Customs

- Although surrounded by Arab countries, Israel is a unique state composed of Jews who have emigrated from all parts of the world. This combination of cultures creates an interesting environment.
- Sabbath is observed from sundown Friday through Sunday
- Avoid discussing politics and relations with their Arab neighbors.

Greeting

- “Shalom”, which means peace is used when greeting and departing
- Handshakes are custom but only with a woman if she initiates it
- Full name is used initially, but first names are encouraged once introduced

Business Practices

- Firm relationships must be patiently established
- Though meetings can be casual, punctuality is required
- Business dress is more relaxed than in other Middle East areas

Israel

Food/Beverage

- Orthodox Jews do not eat pork, shellfish, or certain parts of cow.
- Food must be kosher
- Avoid combinations of meat and milk. Rules require several hours to pass between consumption of each

Gifts

- Gift exchange is commonly practiced and encouraged
- Don't give calla lilies (a type of flower) because it is associated with death

Russia

(including surrounding new states)

Culture/Customs

- Russians are patient and persistent. Willing to wait out their goal.
- Power is valued and consider compromise a sign or weakness
- Speaking or laughing loudly in public is rude
- Almost every Russian smokes

Greeting

- When meeting, a Russian will firmly shake hands
- Russian names have middle names derived from the father
- Unless invited to do so, do not address someone by their first name

Business Practices

- Meetings usually have personal discussions prior to official meeting details
- Russians are intrigued by U.S. technology and goods
- Gift exchange is encouraged and assists in the follow through of business

Russia

(including surrounding new states)

Food/Beverage

- Meals are slow and social
- Dinner involves a lot of toasting.
- Ice Cream is a popular dessert and served at many formal functions

Gifts

- Gift giving is neither extravagant nor formal
- Small, thoughtful tokens are always appreciated
- U.S. goods are highly valued and aid in the process of business

India, Pakistan & Bangladesh

Culture/Customs

- Constant conflict between Hinduism and Islam religion
- Members of different castes seldom mix socially

Greeting

- Traditionally greeting is “namaste” placing hands together and bowing slightly - handshake is becoming popular with Western business
- Address guest with full title and name

Body Language and Clothing

- The red dot on a woman’s forehead usually means she is married
- The “thumb’s up” gesture and pointing index finger are considered rude
- Grasping one’s ears indicates sincerity
- Males hold hands on the street as a sign of friendship

Business Practices

- Meetings proceed slowly and methodically

India, Pakistan & Bangladesh

Food/Beverage

- Business is not discussed at meals
- Cows are sacred animals to Hindus
- Most Hindus do not eat meat, fish or fowl, while others also decline eggs
- As a rule, Hindus do not drink alcohol

Gifts

- Don't give gifts made of leather (cow hide)
- Exchange of gifts is encouraged and shows respect and friendship

Africa

Culture/Customs

- Africa divides politically and geographically into 4 zones. Arab, Middle Eastern, sub-Saharan, and South Africa regions.
- It has a multiplicity of ethnic groups and thousands of languages
- Do not photograph people without permission
- Most South Africans are bi-lingual

Greeting

- Light handshake using right hand. Left hand is “unclean”
- Address by title and proper name. First names are rarely used.

Body Language and Clothing

- Maintain professional posture and poise
- Do not stare or look into eyes for long period of time

Business Practices

- Be prepared to drink tea or coffee at meetings
- Do not rush meetings or include too many details
- Never gesture or serve with the left hand

Africa

Food/Beverage

- Sample all menu selections offered
- Eat everything on your plate or it is considered rude
- Business is not discussed at meals
- Due to cultural differences some Africans do not drink alcohol

Gifts

- Exchange of gifts is encouraged and shows respect and friendship
- Don't give flowers as gifts - this means condolences

Mediterranean

(Portugal, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Greece)

Culture/Customs

- Tempo of life is slower than nearby countries
- Respect for culture and family is high
- Elderly are respected and addressed with authority
- Punctuality is not strictly observed
- Extremely generous and demonstrative
- Bull fighting is very popular in Spain. Never speak of it in negative terms

Greeting

- Firm handshake
- Use of title and full name is expected.

Business Practices

- Business is still mainly male dominated
- During the hours of noon and 3pm, business usually stalls or breaks.
- Do not discuss politics or world affairs
- Meetings are usually formal and adhere to agenda

Mediterranean

(Portugal, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and Greece)

Food/Beverage

- Lunch is the main meal of the day, usually lasting up to 2 hours
- Guests usually depart shortly after dinner concludes
- The oldest guest usually sits at the head of the table – respect
- Wine is a popular drink and served throughout the day at all meals

Gifts

- Gifts are exchanged at the conclusion of business
- U.S. products are well received and enjoyed as gifts
- Gifts are usually opened upon receipt
- Since this area produces very fine wines, it is rude to give them a bottle from another area as a gift

Eastern Europe

(Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia – Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia, and Serbia)

Culture/Customs

- Trying to find their “place” in the world
- Political and religious disagreements
- Very warm, family oriented with strong cultural background

Greeting

- Firm handshake
- Use of title and full name is expected.

Business Practices

- Business is male dominated
- Do not discuss politics or world affairs
- Must bond and create trust

Food/Beverage

- Shortages in some areas of quality food/drink, so it is greatly enjoyed when available
- Due to some religious guidelines certain foods and alcohol are prohibited

Gifts

- Exchange of gifts (particularly U.S. products) appreciated

Western Europe

(England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Austria, and Switzerland)

Culture/Customs

- Old social structure still dominates. Changes come slow.
- Society adheres to family and social tradition
- Proud of high standards of living
- People of England, Wales & Scotland prefer being called “British”

Greeting

- Firm handshake
- Respect for authority and title - Use of title and full name is expected.

Business Practices

- Business is not an all consuming compulsion, as it is in U.S.
- Work is taken seriously, Less competitive -put energy elsewhere
- Do not discuss politics or world affairs – particularly in Ireland

Food/Beverage

- In Germany, do not drink before the guest has done so.
- Food is celebrated and enjoyed -no business conducted at this time

Gifts

- Avoid presenting wine or chocolates to a guest from France
- Do not wrap German gifts in white, brown, or black paper or ribbon.

Nordic

(Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark)

Culture/Customs

- Regional cultural differences, though sometimes “lumped together”
- Summer months are used for long vacations.
- People are quiet and reserved
- Family oriented and focused

Greeting

- Firm handshake with eye contact
- Use of title and full name is expected.

Business Practices

- Business guests are invited to social bonding (work outs, saunas, etc.)
- Meetings are official and rarely involve social talk

Food/Beverage

- “Skoal” is the official toast initiated by a senior ranking member of the meal
- Alcohol is part of the usual meal

Gifts

- It is usual custom to send the guest a gift the following day
- Gifts should not have religious symbols, since religion is a “private matter”

Europe

Culture/Customs

- Each country has its own identity. Though there are some generalities.
- Observe formal social etiquette. Be conservative.
- Private lives stay out of business
- Most are bi-lingual and speak English

Greeting

- Regular handshake
- Some greet guests with a kiss on each cheek. Men often embrace
- Use of title, rank and full name is expected.

Business Practices

- Dress conservatively
- No discussion of business occurs after work hours
- Punctuality is expected

Food/Beverage

- Tea and coffee are usually offered at meetings
- Meals are social occasions and enjoyed

Gifts

- Gifts are not expected, but accepted. However, the quality of the gift is noticed.
- Do not give red roses (romance)

So Much Info – So Little Time!

- As mentioned earlier, there is no way that we can cover everything in one brief session.
- It is up to you to research and prepare for your international guest.
- Where can you obtain such information?
- Good Luck!

