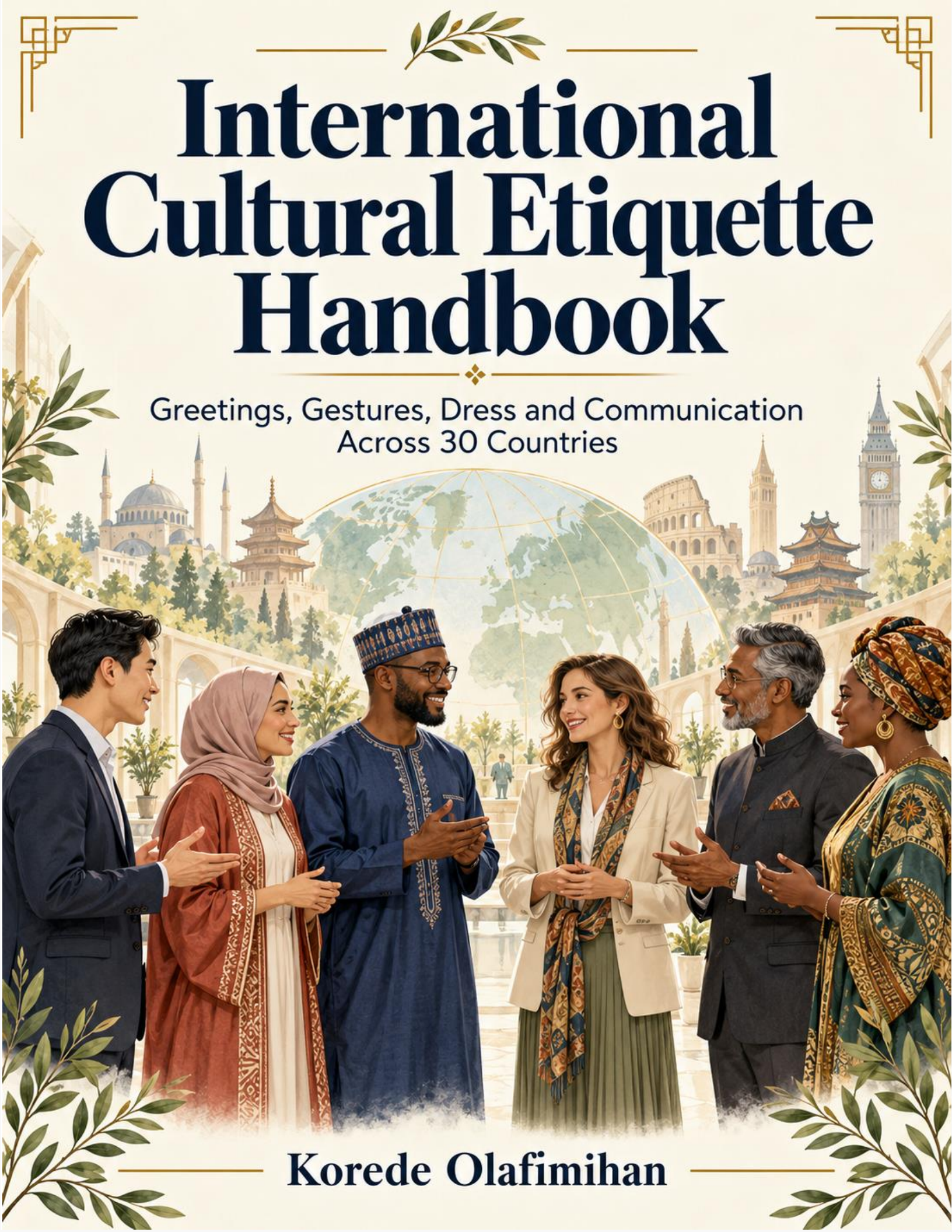
International Cultural Etiquette Handbook

Greetings, Gestures, Dress and Communication Across 30 Countries



Korede Olafimihan

A PRACTICAL LEARNING HANDBOOK

International Cultural Etiquette Handbook

Greetings gestures dress and communication across 30 countries

For students of peacebuilding cultural diplomacy and global development

Use cultural knowledge to prepare better questions, show respect and prevent avoidable misunderstandings.

First edition 2026

How to use this handbook

This handbook helps students, travellers, facilitators and international partners prepare for respectful encounters across 30 countries. Each profile covers greetings, gestures, dress, communication and hospitality, followed by a short application example. Each country includes an AI generated illustration of one possible encounter, rather than a universal portrayal of its people or customs.

The central habit is simple: prepare, observe, ask and adapt. Country guidance describes common patterns and offers practical starting points. It cannot predict the preferences of an individual, household or organisation.

Read people as well as places

Regional identity, religion, age, language, disability, gender, profession and personal experience can matter more than nationality. Ask about a person's preferences without requiring them to explain or defend an entire culture. Never infer beliefs, language or dietary needs from appearance.

Keep consent and access in view

No one must shake hands, bow, kneel, drink alcohol, eat a particular food or take part in a ceremony to demonstrate respect. Offer a courteous alternative. Where a gesture is physically difficult, explain briefly if helpful and choose another respectful form.

Scope and source note

This is an educational etiquette guide, not legal, immigration or official diplomatic protocol advice. Descriptions combine general cultural knowledge with selected reference checks. They are not a claim that every sentence has been independently verified. For a real visit, ask the host and consult current official destination and venue guidance. Sources and further reading appear at the end.

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Everyday habits that prevent friction

Start with a greeting Acknowledge the person before asking for directions, service or a favour. Use their name correctly and ask which form of address they prefer.

Let contact be optional A smile, nod and verbal greeting work across many settings. Wait before offering a hug, kiss or handshake, and accept a different preference easily.

Ask about the occasion A country does not have one dress code. A board meeting, wedding, home visit and place of worship can require different choices.

Check meaning before reacting A pause may mean reflection. A smile may soften discomfort. Direct wording may signal efficiency. Ask what the person means before assigning an intention.

Make agreements explicit After a discussion, summarise the action, responsible person and due date. Courtesy, silence and nodding do not by themselves establish agreement.

Respect privacy and dignity Request consent before taking or publishing photographs. Give corrective feedback privately when possible, and never use identity based humour to break the ice.

Prepare for participation Ask about language, access, food, prayer, timing and non contact greetings before an event. Give people a private way to tell you what they need.

01 AFRICA

Nigeria



Customs differ across ethnic groups, faith communities and generations. Lagos boardrooms and a traditional family ceremony may require different approaches.

Greetings

Greet before making a request. Use a professional title, Sir or Ma when appropriate, and let the person invite first names. Do not assume every community uses Yoruba bowing or kneeling customs.

Gestures and personal space

Offer items with the right hand or both hands where practical. Avoid summoning adults with a single finger. Acknowledge disability or physical limitations without demanding a particular gesture.

Dress

Choose neat professional clothing for meetings and modest clothing for religious visits. Traditional attire can be formal; ask what is appropriate for the event.

Communication

Allow time for courtesy and relationship building. Avoid ethnic jokes and public humiliation. Confirm deadlines explicitly rather than assuming social flexibility applies to work.

Hospitality and visits

Thank the host warmly. Explain dietary restrictions politely; hospitality never requires accepting food or alcohol that you cannot consume.

Put it into practice

A senior participant enters your workshop. Pause to acknowledge them, ask how they prefer to be addressed, then introduce the agenda.

02 AFRICA

Ghana



Respectful greetings and recognition of age often matter. Practices vary among Akan, Ewe, Ga, northern communities and other groups.

Greetings

Acknowledge people before asking for help. Greet the group rather than only the most influential person. Use titles with elders until invited otherwise.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand or both hands for exchanges when possible. Follow a host's lead if a handshake includes a finger snap; a simple handshake is sufficient.

Dress

Wear tidy clothing for work and modest clothing at religious or traditional gatherings. Ask about appropriate dress before a funeral or chiefly ceremony.

Communication

Open with a short personal enquiry, then explain your purpose. Avoid criticising someone sharply in front of others or treating one local language as universal.

Hospitality and visits

Ask before photographing ceremonies or people. If offered refreshment, accept or decline with appreciation and a brief explanation.

Put it into practice

You need directions at a market. Start with a greeting, wait for acknowledgement, and then ask your question.

03 AFRICA

Kenya



Kenya contains many languages and communities. Urban business practice does not represent every rural, coastal or religious setting.

Greetings

A polite hello and a handshake, when welcomed, are common. Jambo is recognisable, but English or a greeting suggested by your host is also suitable.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand or both hands for courteous exchanges. Ask before taking photographs; do not treat traditional clothing as an invitation to photograph someone.

Dress

Professional meetings usually call for neat business clothing. Dress more modestly in conservative coastal and religious settings; keep beachwear at the beach.

Communication

Build rapport without prying. Use titles initially in formal settings, listen carefully, and avoid jokes about ethnicity or accents. Confirm appointments and start times.

Hospitality and visits

Ask your host how a shared meal is served. Do not assume everyone eats with their hands or follows the same religious diet.

Put it into practice

A coastal community visit follows a city meeting. Check the community’s dress and greeting expectations before travelling.

04 AFRICA

South Africa



Language, race, religion, region and personal history shape etiquette. There is no single greeting or social style for the whole country.

Greetings

A friendly verbal greeting is a sound opening. Offer a handshake only if welcome, and learn the correct pronunciation of names rather than substituting nicknames.

Gestures and personal space

Respect personal space and ask before photographs. Do not imitate unfamiliar handshakes, dances or ceremonial practices as entertainment.

Dress

Check the organisation’s dress code. Business attire ranges from formal to relaxed; cultural and faith occasions may have specific requirements.

Communication

Speak respectfully about identity and history. Avoid racial jokes, assumptions about someone’s language, and asking one colleague to speak for an entire community.

Hospitality and visits

Check dietary preferences before a braai or other meal. A social invitation does not imply that everyone drinks alcohol or eats meat.

Put it into practice

A colleague uses a name unfamiliar to you. Ask them to say it again, practise it, and use their preferred form of address.

05 AFRICA

Egypt



Muslim and Christian communities, city and rural settings, and individual preferences all shape social expectations.

Greetings

Begin politely and use titles in formal settings. A handshake may be welcome; with someone of another gender, allow them to indicate whether physical contact is appropriate.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand for passing items when practical. Avoid pointing the soles of your shoes at someone while seated or making aggressive finger gestures.

Dress

Loose clothing covering shoulders and knees is a considerate starting point away from beach settings. Religious sites may require additional covering and shoe removal.

Communication

Allow introductory conversation before business. Discuss disagreements calmly and avoid casual jokes about religion or national identity.

Hospitality and visits

Thank hosts for tea or food, and decline politely if necessary. Ask about meal arrangements during Ramadan instead of assuming everyone is fasting.

Put it into practice

Your host pauses for prayer. Ask when to resume the discussion and use the break without commenting on their religious practice.

06 AFRICA

Morocco



Arab, Amazigh and other influences coexist. Customs vary by household, region, language and religious practice.

Greetings

A courteous verbal greeting is safe. Wait for the other person to initiate a handshake or cheek greeting, especially across genders.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand for eating from shared dishes and passing items when possible. Ask before photographing people and follow signs at sacred sites.

Dress

Choose modest clothing in towns, villages and religious settings. Do not assume access to a religious building; check visitor rules first.

Communication

Begin with courtesy rather than an abrupt demand. Learn whether your host prefers Arabic, French, Amazigh or another language; do not infer fluency from appearance.

Hospitality and visits

Mint tea may be offered as hospitality. Thank the host and explain any need to decline. Follow guidance on shoes and seating in homes.

Put it into practice

A guide invites you into a home. Ask about shoes and where to sit before entering the main room.

07 EUROPE

United Kingdom



England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have distinct identities. Formality also varies by profession and community.

Greetings

Hello or good morning is suitable. A brief handshake may be used at an introduction. Follow the person's lead on titles and first names.

Gestures and personal space

Queue in turn and allow personal space. Avoid a V sign with the palm facing inward; it can be insulting. Ask rather than pushing past.

Dress

Check the venue or invitation. Offices range from business casual to formal; ceremonies and places of worship may require more specific clothing.

Communication

Use please and thank you. Indirect phrases can soften criticism, so clarify politely. Do not assume a courteous comment is a firm agreement.

Hospitality and visits

Ask about shoes in a home and offer to contribute if invited. It is acceptable to decline tea or alcohol politely.

Put it into practice

A colleague says a proposal is "quite interesting." Ask which parts work and what changes they recommend before treating it as approval.

08 EUROPE

Ireland



Friendly conversation is common, but personal boundaries and local identities still matter. Ireland and Northern Ireland are distinct jurisdictions.

Greetings

A relaxed hello and introduction are usually suitable. A handshake may accompany a first meeting. Use the name and title the person gives you.

Gestures and personal space

Allow personal space and avoid assuming a hug is welcome. Do not imitate accents or use Irish cultural symbols as jokes.

Dress

Neat clothing works for most professional visits; check formal invitations. Weather protection is practical, but outdoor clothing may need removing inside.

Communication

Humour and understatement may appear in conversation. Listen before joining in. Avoid opening discussions with assumptions about religion, politics or British identity.

Hospitality and visits

Not everyone drinks alcohol. A pub meeting can include a soft drink, and declining a round should not require justification.

Put it into practice

A host suggests meeting in a pub. Confirm the time and purpose, and order whatever drink suits your needs.

09 EUROPE

France



Social courtesy often begins with acknowledging the person. Formality differs between a shop, a university and a family gathering.

Greetings

Say bonjour before asking for service. Use Madame or Monsieur where appropriate. Do not initiate cheek kisses with a stranger; follow the host’s lead.

Gestures and personal space

A handshake may suit formal introductions. Keep gestures restrained when meeting someone and avoid assuming close physical familiarity.

Dress

Choose neat, context appropriate clothing. Workplaces vary, while religious sites and formal venues may have specific coverage requirements.

Communication

Use vous in French until invited to use tu. Express a disagreement with reasons and courtesy. Do not interpret spirited discussion as personal hostility.

Hospitality and visits

Confirm the meal time and let the host guide seating and serving. Ask about allergies in advance rather than silently leaving food untouched.

Put it into practice

You enter a small shop. Greet the shopkeeper first, then explain what you need and thank them before leaving.

10 EUROPE

Germany



Professional settings often value preparation, clear commitments and punctuality. Personal and regional styles differ.

Greetings

Use a polite greeting and surname or professional title until invited otherwise. In German, retain Sie until the relationship shifts to du.

Gestures and personal space

A brief handshake is common when welcomed. Respect personal space and avoid touching colleagues casually or interrupting a queue.

Dress

Check the organisation’s code rather than assuming every workplace requires a suit. Dress neatly and follow rules at religious or formal venues.

Communication

Be clear, prepared and specific. Direct feedback may address the work rather than the person. Arrive on time and warn promptly if delayed.

Hospitality and visits

If visiting a home, ask about shoes and bring only a modest gift if appropriate. Check dietary needs and avoid assuming beer is expected.

Put it into practice

You will miss a meeting start by ten minutes. Send a message immediately with an estimated arrival time and a brief apology.

11 EUROPE

Italy



Regional habits and degrees of formality vary. Attention to introductions and personal presentation can help establish rapport.

Greetings

Use buongiorno or a courteous hello. Titles may matter in professional introductions. Let the other person initiate cheek greetings.

Gestures and personal space

Conversation may involve expressive hands, but do not copy gestures you do not understand. Avoid touching someone simply because others appear affectionate.

Dress

Neat presentation is a useful default. Cover shoulders and knees where churches require it and remove hats where instructed.

Communication

Allow some relationship building and take professional appointments seriously. Do not assume social timing means deadlines or meeting times are optional.

Hospitality and visits

Follow the host’s pace at a meal and ask before requesting substitutions. Dietary needs can be explained courteously; you need not eat anything unsafe.

Put it into practice

Your group will visit a church after lunch. Check the entry dress requirements before leaving the hotel.

12 EUROPE

Spain



Regional languages and identities matter, including Catalan, Basque and Galician contexts. Customs are not uniform nationwide.

Greetings

A friendly greeting comes before a request. Handshakes suit many first professional meetings; cheek kisses depend on familiarity and context.

Gestures and personal space

Allow others to choose their preferred distance. Do not assume animated gestures give permission for touching or interruption.

Dress

Choose neat clothing for business and check religious site rules. Beachwear usually belongs at the beach or pool rather than in formal public venues.

Communication

Social conversation may be lively. Avoid treating all regional identities as interchangeable. Confirm exact meal and meeting times instead of relying on stereotypes about late schedules.

Hospitality and visits

Ask whether a meal is informal, hosted or shared cost. If a dish is communal, follow the serving practice and disclose allergies early.

Put it into practice

A participant introduces their home region in a particular way. Use their wording and ask respectfully about their preferred language.

13 EUROPE

Netherlands



Informal interaction and clear expression are common in many workplaces, alongside expectations of reliability and respect.

Greetings

A straightforward hello and introduction work well. First names are common, but use the person's chosen introduction rather than assuming familiarity.

Gestures and personal space

Respect personal space and cycle routes. Do not stand in a bicycle lane while talking or photographing a street scene.

Dress

Business casual is common in many organisations, but formal sectors differ. Ask the organiser when an invitation gives no dress guidance.

Communication

Direct questions and criticism may be routine. Respond to the substance without matching bluntness with hostility. Be punctual and make arrangements clearly.

Hospitality and visits

Clarify payment arrangements without embarrassment. Some groups split a bill; other invitations are hosted. Do not assume either outcome.

Put it into practice

Your colleague questions your idea directly. Ask what evidence would address the concern and agree on the next action.

14 EUROPE

Sweden



Many workplaces favour relatively informal interaction, shared participation and respect for personal boundaries.

Greetings

A simple hello and first name introduction are common. A handshake may be used; do not assume a hug is part of a first meeting.

Gestures and personal space

Give people space, queue in turn and avoid unnecessary touching. A calm gesture is preferable to beckoning someone aggressively.

Dress

Neat practical clothing suits many settings; confirm the code for formal events. Ask about removing shoes in private homes.

Communication

Allow others to finish and make room for quieter voices. Punctuality matters, and consensus seeking does not mean no one is responsible for a decision.

Hospitality and visits

A fika break can provide space for conversation, but participation should not require coffee or particular foods. Check dietary needs.

Put it into practice

You chair a mixed group meeting. Invite each person’s view, summarise differences, and state who will make the final decision.

15 EUROPE

Finland



Quietness can be comfortable rather than unfriendly. Age, language, region and individual personality influence interaction.

Greetings

A simple hello and clear introduction are suitable. Handshakes are common in introductions when welcomed; avoid imposing hugs.

Gestures and personal space

Allow space and do not force sustained eye contact or touch. A pause in conversation need not be filled immediately.

Dress

Practical neat clothing is common. Ask about shoes in homes. At a sauna, check the venue's clothing rules and remember participation is optional.

Communication

Speak clearly, keep promises and arrive on time. Give people time to answer rather than interpreting silence as agreement or disinterest.

Hospitality and visits

Sauna invitations can be declined politely. Never photograph people in bathing or changing areas without explicit permission.

Put it into practice

A participant pauses before answering. Wait, then ask whether they need more information instead of answering for them.

16 AMERICAS

United States



Communication and dress differ widely across states, communities, employers and generations. Avoid treating one workplace as the national model.

Greetings

Hello and a name introduction are generally suitable. First names are common, but formal, academic and ceremonial contexts may use titles.

Gestures and personal space

Respect personal space and ask before hugs or photographs. Do not assume smiling, friendliness or eye contact signals consent or intimacy.

Dress

Check the employer or event code. Business casual has different meanings across organisations; a job interview may require greater formality.

Communication

Communicate your purpose and expected action clearly. Avoid jokes about race, disability or identity. Clarify casual invitations before treating them as arrangements.

Hospitality and visits

Ask about food restrictions and whether guests should bring anything. Alcohol is optional. Check the venue's service charge and tipping guidance.

Put it into practice

Someone says "We should get together." Suggest a date and confirm availability before putting it in your calendar.

17 AMERICAS

Canada



English, French, Indigenous and many immigrant cultural settings coexist. Regional and community protocols should guide behaviour.

Greetings

A polite hello and name introduction work well. In a French speaking setting, bonjour is a courteous start; ask which language is preferred.

Gestures and personal space

Queue, allow personal space and request consent before touching or photographing. Follow community guidance at Indigenous events rather than inventing ceremonial gestures.

Dress

Dress for the setting and weather. Ask whether shoes should be removed in a home, especially during wet or snowy conditions.

Communication

Use inclusive language and pronounce names carefully. Do not assume everyone identifies culturally with the United States or speaks the same language.

Hospitality and visits

Check dietary preferences and accessibility when arranging meals. Ask local hosts about ceremony specific gifts rather than presenting symbolic items without guidance.

Put it into practice

You attend an Indigenous community event. Contact the organiser about visitor protocol, photography and whether a gift is appropriate.

18 AMERICAS

Mexico



Courtesy and relationship building can be important, while regional and Indigenous traditions vary considerably.

Greetings

Greet people before beginning business. Use Señor, Señora or a professional title where appropriate; let the host guide first names and physical greetings.

Gestures and personal space

A handshake is a useful option if welcomed. Do not initiate embraces or cheek kisses simply because other guests do.

Dress

Wear neat professional clothing for formal appointments. Check coverage requirements at religious sites and avoid assuming resort wear suits city meetings.

Communication

Allow introductory conversation and make requests respectfully. Avoid jokes about migration, crime or poverty. Confirm appointment times rather than assuming lateness is expected.

Hospitality and visits

Thank the host and ask about seating and serving. Explain restrictions politely and do not feel obliged to accept alcohol.

Put it into practice

You arrive for a partner meeting. Introduce yourself, exchange a few courteous remarks, and then ask permission to begin the agenda.

19 AMERICAS

Brazil



Brazil is Portuguese speaking and highly diverse. Greetings, distance and formality differ by region, setting and relationship.

Greetings

A warm hello and name introduction are appropriate. Handshakes and cheek greetings occur, but allow the other person to guide physical contact.

Gestures and personal space

Avoid using the finger and thumb circle as a casual signal; it can be offensive in some contexts. Use words or an open hand instead.

Dress

Neat presentation suits professional visits. Beach clothing is not a general business dress code. Ask about formal or religious event requirements.

Communication

Some conversations are animated and overlapping, but do not assume everyone welcomes interruption. Avoid Spanish as a default and ask about language needs.

Hospitality and visits

Check the precise arrival time for a social invitation. Hospitality does not require alcohol; a polite refusal should be accepted.

Put it into practice

You plan slides for a Brazilian audience. Ask whether Portuguese interpretation is needed instead of supplying Spanish materials.

20 ASIA

China



Regional, linguistic, generational and organisational differences are substantial. Confirm the context of the visit rather than relying on a single national script.

Greetings

Use surnames and titles in formal introductions until invited otherwise. A nod or light handshake may be appropriate; follow the other person’s lead.

Gestures and personal space

Offer and receive a business card or formal gift with both hands when practical. Avoid sticking chopsticks upright in food or pointing them at people.

Dress

Choose neat, relatively restrained professional clothing for formal meetings. Check site rules for religious or ceremonial visits.

Communication

Preserve dignity when disagreeing: raise concerns calmly and offer private feedback where possible. Confirm commitments rather than assuming a polite response means approval.

Hospitality and visits

Let the host guide seating and serving at a formal meal. Gifts may be restricted by organisational policy; ask before bringing one.

Put it into practice

A counterpart says your proposed date may be difficult. Offer alternatives and ask which date can actually be confirmed.

21 ASIA

Japan



Visitor etiquette depends on the venue and relationship. Courtesy matters more than trying to perform an elaborate ritual perfectly.

Greetings

A small bow is a respectful opening. Handshakes also occur internationally; follow the host rather than attempting a handshake and deep bow simultaneously.

Gestures and personal space

Handle business cards attentively, preferably with both hands. Do not plant chopsticks upright in rice or pass food directly from chopstick to chopstick.

Dress

Choose neat professional clothing. Remove shoes where indicated in homes and traditional spaces, and follow any separate slipper arrangements.

Communication

Speak calmly and avoid public confrontation. An acknowledgement may show listening rather than agreement; confirm decisions and responsibilities explicitly.

Hospitality and visits

Keep your voice low on public transport. Check bathing facility rules in advance, including clothing and tattoo policies, which vary.

Put it into practice

At a home entrance, pause and observe the shoe area. Ask where shoes and slippers belong before stepping inside.

22 ASIA

South Korea



Age, role and relationship may influence formality, particularly at work. Younger and international settings may differ.

Greetings

A slight bow and polite greeting are useful. Use a title or appropriate formal address until your host suggests a more familiar form.

Gestures and personal space

Use both hands, or support the right forearm with the left hand, when offering important items to an elder or senior person. Avoid casual head touching.

Dress

Dress neatly for work and check the host organisation’s code. Remove shoes in homes and other spaces where indicated.

Communication

Avoid humiliating someone in front of colleagues. Be clear but respectful about disagreement and confirm what a courteous response actually commits to.

Hospitality and visits

Wait for guidance at a formal meal, especially around senior guests. You may decline alcohol politely; do not pressure anyone else to drink.

Put it into practice

A senior host offers a business card. Receive it attentively, read the name, and place it carefully rather than immediately putting it in a back pocket.

23 ASIA

India



Languages, religions, caste experiences, regions and generations shape interaction. No greeting or diet represents every Indian person.

Greetings

Namaste with palms together is a useful non contact option. Handshakes are also common in business; let the person choose physical contact.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand or both hands for respectful exchanges where possible. Avoid pointing feet at people or sacred objects.

Dress

Dress modestly for religious and community visits. Shoes and head covering rules vary by site; ask rather than applying one rule everywhere.

Communication

Use titles initially in formal contexts. Avoid jokes about religion, caste or accents. Confirm a deadline or decision clearly when responses are indirect.

Hospitality and visits

Ask about vegetarian, vegan, halal and other requirements without assumptions. Do not bring beef, pork or alcohol as a gift without checking.

Put it into practice

You arrange a team dinner. Ask each guest privately about dietary needs and select a venue with suitable options.

24 ASIA

Indonesia



The country includes many ethnic and religious communities. Bali, Jakarta and Aceh can require different visitor choices.

Greetings

A courteous verbal greeting and slight nod are safe. Handshakes may be gentle, and some people avoid contact across genders.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand or both hands for passing items when possible. Avoid touching heads and pointing forcefully with one finger.

Dress

Choose modest clothing for community and religious visits. Temple and mosque rules differ; a sarong, head covering or shoe removal may be required.

Communication

Use a calm tone and avoid public embarrassment. Ask respectfully about unclear answers instead of treating politeness as confirmed consent.

Hospitality and visits

Check food and drink restrictions and shoe customs in homes. Do not assume practices in a tourist resort apply elsewhere.

Put it into practice

Your trip includes a temple and a mosque. Ask each venue about its own visitor rules before packing.

25 ASIA

Malaysia



Malay, Chinese, Indian, Indigenous and other communities have distinct customs. Religion and individual choice affect social contact.

Greetings

Begin with a polite greeting. Allow the other person to initiate a handshake, particularly across genders; a nod is a respectful alternative.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand or both hands for giving and receiving when practical. Avoid pointing directly at someone or touching their head.

Dress

Modest clothing is considerate in religious and conservative settings. Check footwear, head covering and visitor requirements at each place of worship.

Communication

Use titles in formal situations and correct names carefully. Raise concerns calmly and avoid asking one person to represent all Malaysian communities.

Hospitality and visits

Check halal and other dietary needs before choosing a restaurant. Alcohol is not a neutral gift; ask first.

Put it into practice

You host a multicultural delegation. Collect dietary and greeting preferences in advance and provide a non contact greeting option.

26 ASIA

Singapore



Ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity shapes etiquette. Organisational rules may matter more than a general cultural expectation.

Greetings

A polite hello and name introduction are reliable. Handshakes are common in many workplaces, but allow a non contact option without comment.

Gestures and personal space

Handle cards and documents attentively, using both hands when appropriate. Avoid touching heads or making assumptions about physical greetings.

Dress

Business clothing ranges from smart casual to formal. Dress respectfully at temples, mosques and churches and follow posted visitor instructions.

Communication

Be punctual and clear. Ask how names should be pronounced and ordered. Avoid ethnic humour or assuming everyone speaks Mandarin.

Hospitality and visits

Ask about halal, vegetarian and other food requirements. Follow venue signage and current local guidance rather than relying on internet stories about rules.

Put it into practice

Your colleague introduces a name you cannot confidently pronounce. Ask for the preferred pronunciation and form of address.

27 ASIA

Thailand



Respectful public behaviour matters, with differences between tourist settings, workplaces and religious spaces.

Greetings

A polite hello and small nod are safe. The wai joins the palms with a slight bow; follow your host's guidance rather than using it indiscriminately.

Gestures and personal space

Avoid touching heads, pointing feet toward people or sacred objects, or stepping over someone. Use an open hand instead of an aggressive pointing finger.

Dress

Cover shoulders and knees where temples require it. Remove shoes when instructed and keep beach clothing to appropriate leisure areas.

Communication

Keep your voice calm and avoid public humiliation. Treat religious imagery and the monarchy respectfully. Clarify an uncertain answer politely.

Hospitality and visits

Follow temple staff instructions; some interactions with monks have specific contact rules. Ask before photographing people or religious activity.

Put it into practice

A disagreement develops at a service desk. Lower your voice, explain the practical problem, and ask for a workable solution.

28 MIDDLE EAST

United Arab Emirates



Emirates, venues and communities differ. International business settings coexist with local Emirati customs and religious traditions.

Greetings

Use a courteous greeting and titles in formal introductions. Let the other person initiate a handshake, especially across genders.

Gestures and personal space

Use the right hand or both hands for formal exchanges where practical. Avoid pointing shoe soles toward someone and ask permission before photographs.

Dress

Choose modest clothing in public and religious settings. Beachwear belongs in designated leisure areas; mosque visits can require additional covering.

Communication

Allow time for courtesy and keep disagreement calm. Avoid jokes about faith or identity. Confirm schedules around religious observances with your host.

Hospitality and visits

Ask about appropriate gifts and refreshments. Alcohol is not a default gift. Check current official guidance for venue rules and Ramadan arrangements.

Put it into practice

You plan a reception during Ramadan. Ask your local partner about timing, food service and the needs of fasting and non fasting guests.

29 OCEANIA

Australia



Informality is common in many settings, but community, profession and occasion still shape expectations.

Greetings

A friendly hello and first name introduction are usually suitable. Handshakes may be used; do not force casual slang or nicknames.

Gestures and personal space

Queue, respect personal space and ask before touching or photographing people. Follow local guidance around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural material.

Dress

Check workplace codes. Casual outdoor culture does not make beachwear appropriate for every meeting; protective clothing may also be required on site.

Communication

Be clear and approachable. Humour may be informal, but avoid jokes about race, identity or disability. Do not imitate accents to establish rapport.

Hospitality and visits

Ask about community protocol before visiting Country or sacred places. A Welcome to Country is given by appropriate Traditional Owners; visitors should not invent one.

Put it into practice

You organise a public event. Ask the relevant local community or organiser about a suitable Welcome to Country or acknowledgement.

30 OCEANIA

New Zealand



Māori tikanga and many other cultural traditions shape life. Protocol differs between everyday workplaces and a formal marae visit.

Greetings

Hello or kia ora is a suitable opening in many settings. A handshake may be used; a hongi is not a greeting to initiate without invitation.

Gestures and personal space

Avoid sitting on tables or surfaces used for food in Māori settings. Follow hosts' directions about shoes, seating and photography at a marae.

Dress

Neat practical clothing suits many workplaces. For a pōwhiri or other formal occasion, ask your hosts about the expected clothing.

Communication

Pronounce Māori names carefully and listen respectfully during speeches or karakia. Do not interrupt because you do not understand; request an explanation at an appropriate time.

Hospitality and visits

Marae kawa varies. Ask about welcome procedures and when to eat or move between spaces, rather than copying a ceremony from a video.

Put it into practice

Your group is invited to a marae. Nominate a contact to ask hosts about arrival, dress, introductions and accessibility before the visit.

Etiquette for peacebuilding and dialogue

In a tense setting, etiquette supports trust when it gives each participant a fair opportunity to speak and preserves dignity. A correct greeting cannot replace safety, impartiality, or a credible process.

Before the meeting

Consult more than one local adviser, including people whose voices are often overlooked. Ask about names, languages, seating, greeting preferences and the meaning of the venue. Do not select a sacred or politically symbolic location without checking its implications.

During the discussion

Agree on turn taking, interpretation, breaks and how concerns can be raised. Avoid making one group's greeting, prayer or clothing the condition for participation. Explain a pause or change of plan so it is not read as favouritism.

When tension rises

Describe the behaviour without assigning a cultural motive. Say "We have interrupted each other several times" rather than "Your people do not listen." Offer a break or a private clarification before continuing.

When an etiquette mistake occurs

Acknowledge the specific action, apologise briefly and ask how to correct it. Avoid lengthy explanations of your good intentions. Apply the correction and return attention to the purpose of the meeting.

After the meeting

Send a plain language record of decisions and unresolved points. Check that translations preserve the same commitments. Ask participants privately whether any part of the process made participation difficult.

Practical language for respectful encounters

Names and introductions

“How would you like me to address you?” “Could you help me pronounce your name correctly?”

Greetings and contact

“It is a pleasure to meet you.” “I usually greet without physical contact, but I am very pleased to be here.”

Dress and venue rules

“Is there a dress code or anything visitors should know before arriving?” “Should I remove my shoes here?”

Dietary and access needs

“Are there food, access or scheduling requirements you would like us to arrange?” “You may share these privately with the organiser.”

Clarifying meaning

“When you say the date may be possible, should we treat it as provisional?” “What would you need before confirming?”

Disagreeing respectfully

“I understand the concern. May I explain the difficulty from our side?” “Which part could we change to make this workable?”

Repairing a mistake

“I am sorry I interrupted that part of the ceremony. What should I do now?” “Thank you for explaining. I will follow that guidance.”

Declining hospitality

“Thank you for offering. I cannot have that, but I appreciate your kindness.” “Water would be lovely, if available.”

These are adaptable English scripts written for this handbook. They are not translations, traditional formulas or quotations from the sources.

International meeting preparation checklist

Use these prompts before a delegation visit, online class, community dialogue or international partnership meeting.

- Confirm the country, community, organisation and purpose of the visit.
- Check preferred names, titles, pronunciation and languages.
- Offer a greeting that does not depend on physical contact.
- Ask about venue rules, dress, footwear and photography.
- Confirm exact local time, date, duration and arrival arrangements.
- Check interpretation and accessible participation requirements.
- Collect food and drink needs privately; offer suitable alternatives.
- Ask about prayer, fasting, holidays and suitable break times.
- Check gift policies before purchasing or presenting anything.
- Agree on how people can disagree, request a break or raise concerns.
- Summarise decisions, responsibilities and deadlines in writing.
- Ask a local contact to review assumptions before the event.

Online meetings

Use the same care with names, titles and turn taking online. Display time zones clearly, explain camera expectations, and do not make camera use a test of respect. Obtain permission before recording. Avoid interpreting a slow response as disinterest when interpretation, connectivity or accessibility may explain it.

Sources and further reading

Selected references consulted or located during preparation on 21 October 2026. These support further learning; they do not certify every practice in every country. The profile guidance is a synthesis, and the practical examples and activities are original.

Cultural Atlas overview

SBS Learn introduces the cross cultural resource and its coverage of greetings, communication and etiquette.

https://www.sbs.com.au/learn/the-cultural-atlas/

Country profiles

Cultural Atlas provides country entry points. Content and access can change; consult the relevant community and current host guidance.

https://theculturalatlas.org/

Nigeria

The Guardian Nigeria, What is the etiquette in Nigeria, covers greetings, titles, right hand exchanges and context appropriate dress.

https://guardian.ng/nigerian/what-is-the-etiquette-in-nigeria/

Ghana

Lonely Planet, 18 things to know before traveling to Ghana, discusses greetings, elders and hand etiquette.

https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/things-to-know-before-traveling-to-ghana

Japan and comparative etiquette

Condé Nast Traveler, Global Etiquette Rules Why You Should Take Your Shoes Off in Japan, provides expert commentary. Older coverage should be checked against current venue guidance.

https://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-you-should-take-your-shoes-off-in-japan-global-etiquette-tips

Japan official visitor information

Japan National Tourism Organization provides visitor guidance and links to Japanese manners resources.

https://www.japan.travel/en/us/

Finland official visitor information

Visit Finland provides information about sauna experiences and etiquette. Confirm the individual venue’s requirements.

https://www.visitfinland.com/en/

Māori marae protocol

Te Ara Encyclopedia of New Zealand, Te kawa o te marae, explains marae protocol and variation in welcome practices.

https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-kawa-o-te-marae/print

Pacific cultural etiquette

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme library, Cultural Etiquette Pacific Islands, is useful for regional protocol context.

https://library.sprep.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/2020_Cultural_Etiquette_Pacific_Islands.pdf

Before using this guide in the field

Ask a local host to review the relevant profile. Check official destination guidance for current rules and ask the specific venue about access and dress. A person’s stated preference takes priority over a general pattern in this handbook.

About the Author



Korede Olafimihan

Korede Olafimihan is the author of the International Cultural Etiquette Handbook. His experience includes work with several non-governmental organisations, which informs his interest in community engagement, cultural understanding and cooperation.

In this handbook, he brings together practical guidance on greetings, gestures, dress and communication across 30 countries. His emphasis is on approaching people with respect, asking thoughtful questions and recognising differences within as well as between cultures.