



8 ETIQUETTE TIPS WHEN DOING BUSINESS IN THE UAE

In the realm of global business, understanding cultural nuances is just as important as smart decisions. This holds especially true in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where tradition blends with modernity. As the UAE attracts businesses worldwide, knowing basic business etiquette is key. This article offers eight simple tips to help you navigate successful business interactions in the UAE.

1. Greetings

Building a solid foundation begins with understanding the UAE's culture and traditions. The traditional salutation is “As-salam alaikum” (may peace be upon you), and the response is “Wa alaikum as-salam” (and upon you be peace). Handshakes constitute the customary manner of greeting, yet it's important to utilize only your right hand, maintain direct eye contact, and address individuals by their titles. However, when greeting women, men should await the woman's initiative before extending their hand. Given the prevailing preference for more reserved salutations between individuals of different genders, opting for a friendly smile or simply replacing the handshake with a gesture of touching your right palm to your heart when uncertain is a recommended approach.

2. Communication and Building Relationships

In general, Emirati people tend to communicate indirectly. The English language is widely used in business communications such as emails and documents. Business discussions often commence with personal conversations and exchanges about general topics. When exchanging business cards, do so with your right hand or both hands and take a moment to read the card before putting it away. It is advisable to have business cards printed in both Arabic and English.

Physical contact with people of the opposite gender especially in a business setting is strongly discouraged, particularly when interacting with Muslims. Keep in mind that using disrespectful language or offensive words is not allowed. Engaging in online activities that involve swearing, insulting others, or harming someone's reputation is considered a serious offense and can lead to harsh penalties.

3. Dress Code

Dress modestly according to the local dress code especially when entering government premises. When in a business setting opt for respectful clothing that will cover both your shoulders and knees. Avoid wearing revealing, sheer, and very tight clothing, particularly outside beach or resort areas. Dubai may exhibit a relatively lesser degree of conservatism in comparison to other emirates, but maintaining appropriate attire when in public remains of utmost importance.

4. Accepting Hospitality

Hospitality is an integral part of Emirati culture. Refreshments are often accompanied by dates or Arabic (“gahwa”) coffee. If you are invited to someone's home, it's usual to take off your shoes when you go inside. Many houses have a special room just for receiving guests or having special events called the “Majlis” in Arabic. Usually, this room has seats close to the ground, which goes back to the way people used to live in tents. Meals are often put on a big, round plate, and sometimes you might use your hands to eat. After the meal, it is customary for Arabic coffee and fruit to potentially be offered before taking your leave.



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5. Punctuality with Flexibility

Punctuality varies in the UAE, therefore, expect the possibility of meetings running behind schedule, thus it's advisable to keep a flexible timetable. Patience is essential, and business meetings may extend beyond the scheduled time. Always try to confirm appointments for meetings a couple of days beforehand.

6. Critique Religion or Government

Refrain from discussing sensitive topics such as religion, politics, or criticism of the government, which might not only be considered offensive but possibly even constitute a criminal act. Any comments that could for example be understood as disrespecting or insulting the President of the State, the country as such, its flag and national symbols, its people, or the religion must be strictly avoided.

7. Gestures

When seated, avoid crossing your legs with the sole of your shoe pointing at someone, as this is considered rude. Additionally, it's best to avoid using your left hand during interactions, as it holds connotations of lesser cleanliness in Arab culture. Exercise courtesy by refraining from pointing directly at someone, which is considered impolite. Avoid sitting in a way that exposes the soles of your feet, as this can be seen as disrespectful in Arabic culture.

On a more serious note, displaying obscene gestures is considered a crime in the UAE. Engaging in inappropriate behavior can damage an individual's reputation and self-respect, and such actions are subject to legal consequences. According to [Federal Law No. 3 Concerning the Penal Code](#), a misdemeanor is an offense that carries one or more of the following penalties: a jail sentence, a fine exceeding a thousand Dirhams, and blood money.



8. Prayers and Places of Worship

Islam is the recognized and predominant religion in the UAE, practiced by around 76% of the people. Additionally, other significant religions present in the UAE encompass Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. [Dubai's Executive Council Resolution No. \(31\) of 2021](#) states that disrupting the "adhan" (call for prayer), "iqama" (call to commence prayer), or prayer itself, as well as interfering with authorized activities and events, can lead to consequences. Avoid conducting loud conversations or playing music out of respect for religious practices. While the Constitution of the UAE upholds religious freedom based on established traditions, and the government typically honors this right in practice, promoting Christianity among Muslims is restricted.

Etiquette acts as a guide to strong partnerships in the business scene. By following these basic principles, you can confidently navigate the intricacies of the UAE's culture. Remember, showing respect for traditions, being aware of cultural norms, and building genuine relationships are essential for your business to thrive in the UAE.

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