

Savoir-vivre around the world

Have you ever made a faux-pas in a different country? Did you do anything stupid while travelling making local people laugh? Did you get embarrassed? Here are a few tips on what not to do in different countries.



France

Travelling to Paris or Marseille? Learning a few French words before you go is a must. French people are proud of their language and reluctant to learn English. Starting a conversation in English even in touristic places such as a restaurant might be considered rude. French people will appreciate travellers saying even a few words in their language. Making pronunciation and grammatical mistakes is not an issue for them. Secondly, be prepared that almost everyone, even people you just got to know, will be kissing you on your cheek. If you are male, French male friends will be kissing you as well. The number of kisses to be made depends on the region. Last, but not least, be aware of etiquette at the table. Question: "Excuse me, where is the toilet?" is forbidden. Instead of that, you should ask: "Excuse me, where can I wash my hands?". The word "toilet" is forbidden while dining.

China

Going to Shanghai or Beijing to try Chinese cuisine? A business trip to Guangzhou? Be careful where you put your chopsticks. Never stick them horizontally into your bowl with rice. It means a death in the family. Chinese people are very superstitious. The same rule applies to Japan. In case you need to put them aside, use special the chopstick holder placed next to your bowl.

Another important thing in China are business cards; Chinese people love them. While talking to Chinese people you might get lots of them, even from very small entrepreneurs. If you are travelling there for business, prepare your own ones. The best choice is to have them both in English and Chinese on each side. For Chinese, one's position in society is crucial, so you need to mark your position clearly on your business card. Always give your card using both hands - it's really important and shows your respect. While you receive one you need to take it using both hands as well, look what's on it to show your respect and express thanks. What is really typical for all Far Eastern countries such as China, Japan or South Korea is that you need to be aware of their honour, sometimes called 'face'. Criticising any of your co-workers in public is not a good idea. Asians consider being criticised in public as a humiliation, a loss of honour and loss of face. Criticism may cause them to leave a job or even to commit suicide. Be careful, feedback should be passed face to face without any publicity. For Chinese and Japanese, the opinion and position they have in society is crucial as they consider themselves not as an individual, but more in a collective context.

Japan

If you are planning a trip to Japan don't forget to pack two pairs of clean slippers. In Japan it's mandatory to take off your shoes right when you enter the house. They wear slippers at home or bare, but always clean feet. The bathrooms are usually spotlessly clean, but Japanese culture considers them to be a 'dirty place', so you need to have a different pair of slippers or flip flops for the rest room only. Entering a Japanese house in shoes means showing disrespect to your host. To make things even more complicated, you need to leave your shoes with the toes pointing to the door. There are also separate slippers to wear while going to the balcony, patio, garden, etc. :)

The Netherlands

Dutch people are very direct, which might appear rude. Not at all! Citizens of The Netherlands are very direct and self-confident and consider it as an advantage. They are open to talk about anything and there is no conversation taboo.

Additionally, the Dutch are very pragmatic and like things to be useful. Hard work is highly appreciated, but the effect of your work is the most important. Everything needs to be planned and team work is highly valued. One of the worst faux pas you can make is to ask a new Dutch friend if you can visit them at home. They enjoy meeting friends in bars, but home is their castle. It's a private place and inviting guests is very rare. What is interesting - they have nothing to hide, as there are no curtains in the windows. Any unaccepted visit - even in the case of best friends - must be arranged in advance on the phone. Unexpected visits will make your Dutch host feel embarrassed. If you want to hang out with them, they all love cafes, restaurants and pubs and never look at the costs. In case a Dutch person invites you to their house, no need to take off your shoes. :)

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