



MIDDLE EAST ETIQUETTE

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Culture

Many matters of etiquette in the Middle East are connected to Islam as it is written in the Qur'an and how it has been traditionally understood and practiced throughout the centuries. Prescribed Islamic etiquette is referred to as Adab, and described as "refinement, good manners, morals, ethics, decorum, decency, humaneness and righteousness".

Greetings and Body Language

Traditionally, many Muslims only shake hands with someone of the same gender. When greeting someone of the opposite gender, people may keep their hands to the sides politely and bow their head slightly; or they may just give a verbal greeting.

Do not put your feet up. When sitting in a meeting or social gathering, don't put your feet up. It's considered extremely rude in the Arab culture to show others the soles of your feet, even when you are sitting on the floor or crossing your legs.

Avoid public display of affection. Foreigners should also avoid any displays of affection in public between men and women as this is considered haram (forbidden or a shame in the Arab world).

In many cases, people of the same gender holding hands while walking is considered an ordinary display of friendship without romantic connotations.

Food and Drink

It is common for people to take their food from a common plate in the center of the table. Rather than using forks or spoons, people may scoop up hummus and other foodstuff with pita bread.

Alcohol is forbidden in Islam.

You should also be aware that Muslims do not eat pork at all. Meat must be halal, or prepared in the ways of Islamic traditions.

Among Muslims, the left hand is reserved for bodily hygiene and considered unclean. Thus, the right hand should be used for eating. Shaking hands or handing over an item with one's left hand is an insult.

Clothing

The modesty of one's personal attire is of great concern to many in the Middle East, although the parameters of this modesty vary. In Saudi Arabia, many families expect all female members to wear a Niqab or Burqa while even men and women visiting from other cultures should wear very non-revealing clothes to avoid harsh confrontation. In another example, males and females in shorts, skimpy t-shirts or other "flashy" clothes might find themselves roughly evicted from a variety of places, especially holy sites.

Alcohol and Drugs

Holding, consuming, buying or selling any kind of drug - in any quantity - as well as being tested positive to any drug by the authorities is considered a crime and may be punishable by death.

Alcohol consumption as well as buying, selling or possessing alcoholic drinks is considered a crime in



most countries.

Some medicines containing psychotropic substances are forbidden in most countries. Furthermore, one must carry a prescription from a licensed medical doctor. Visitors shall verify that their medicines are allowed in the country before entering the country.

Religion

Muslims pray five times a day. Each prayer is announced from the mosques by a call to prayer. When the call to prayer is heard, music shall be turned off in all public places and cars, and Muslims shall be allowed to perform their prayer duty.

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Throughout this month, eating, drinking or smoking in public spaces during daylight is considered a public offence and is punishable by law.

Miscellaneous

Swearing, profanities, insults and all kinds of vulgar language are strictly forbidden and are legally reprehensible in case of complaint. All kinds of aggressive or offensive gestures are considered a public offence and are subjected to fines or imprisonment.

It is the duty of every citizen, resident and visitor to show respect for the symbols of the rulers, flag and national emblem. The abuse of any of those symbols is a crime punishable by law.

Photos of people - and especially photos of women and families - in public places shall not be taken without their permission. Taking photos of people is a sensitive issue in local culture.

Taking photos of Palaces, Military Installations or Government Buildings in most countries is illegal.

