

# BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



## SINGAPORE

### WORKING HOURS

- Monday to Friday 9:00am to 1:00pm and from 2:00pm to 5:00pm.
- Generally, most companies practice 5 days and 40 hours work week with an hour lunch break, though some companies still work half a day in the morning of the Saturday.

### PUNCTUALITY

- Although Singaporeans tend to arrive late for social events, being late for business appointments is paramount to an insult.

### GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Singapore prides itself on being the most corruption-free state in Asia. Consequently,
- it has strict laws against bribery. Government employees may not accept gifts of any kind, especially money. A large gift should be presented to the entire group. When giving small gifts, they should be given to everyone present.
- You can offer a present as a welcome gift or a thank you gift but it should not be an overly expensive item. Some suitable gifts: chocolates, a souvenir from your country, a corporate gift with your company logo, brand name gifts [which don't have to be too expensive].
- To be polite, people will usually refuse a gift before accepting it.
- They believe that this will prevent them from appearing greedy. You can continue to insist that they accept the gift and, upon acceptance, say that you are pleased that he or she has done so.
- Unwrapping a gift in front of the giver is not a part of Singaporean culture. This action implies that the recipient is greedy and impatient.
- Moreover, if the gift turns out to be a poor choice, it will result in awkwardness. Instead, the recipient will briefly say 'thank-you', set aside the gift, and then open it only after your departure.

### BUSINESS CLOTHING

- High on the list is dress code. The country is little more than one degree north of the equator and the weather is usually hot and humid so smart business shirts and pants or skirts without jackets or blazers is fine.
- Of course, it all depends on the culture of the particular company you're doing business with. You can even give the tie a skip if the meeting is not very formal.



## BUSINESS MEETINGS

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- When meeting a business acquaintance for the first time, a handshake is sufficient. Bowing is completely unnecessary unless a specific culture requires it
- Maintain a normal amount of body contact and allow personal space between you and your interlocutor. You may notice Malays will usually greet each other with a handshake followed by a palm placed briefly over their own heart.
- This is a cultural greeting and you are not expected to emulate this if you are not of Malay heritage. If in doubt go for a simple, polite handshake and a warm smile.
- Business cards play an important role in Singapore. A business card is extended at almost every first meeting. The polite standard is to proffer the business card with both hands, with the letters oriented towards the receiver.
- Accepting a business card is also done with both hands as a sign of respect.
- When receiving the business card, it's good practice to view it briefly then hold on to it for some time and leave it on the table, face-up during a meeting.
- While most will not take any offence at immediately pocketing a business card, some might so it's a good idea to engage with the process.

## BUSINESS MEALS

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- Business breakfasts are rare in Singapore.
- Lunch is the preferred meal for business discussions.
- Spouses are rarely, if ever, invited to these power meals.
- As long lunches are not uncommon in Singapore it may be wise to avoid scheduling meetings between noon and 2pm.

## ADDRESSING A PERSON

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- When making introductions for the first time and in formal meetings, always use the person's title and family name followed by his personal name, if he has a Chinese name.
- If he has a western name like "Peter", he should be introduced in the same way as in the West, i.e. given name before family name.
- The Malays do not use a family name. They use their own personal name followed by bin (son of) or binti (daughter of) before their father's personal name.
- The Indians use their personal name followed by s/o (son of) or d/o (daughter of) and the father's personal name.

## NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

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- Approx. 11 days

## CONVERSATION

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- In Singapore, it is considered perfectly acceptable to ask people questions about their weight, income, marital status, and related subjects. If this makes you uncomfortable, side-step these questions as graciously as possible so you don't cause the questioner to "lose face".
- Speak in low, calm tones of voice, and avoid raising your voice or becoming overly emotional and showing anger.
- Age and seniority are revered in this culture. If you are part of a delegation, ensure that the most important members are introduced first. If you are introducing two people, state the name of the most important individual first.
- Avoid publicly debating, correcting, or disagreeing with an older person or superior. The older person or superior will only "lose face", and, consequently, you will lose the respect of others

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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- Singaporeans, work some of the longest hours in the world – the highest in 2016 with 2,371.2 hours per average worker- long hours are seen as a marker for hard work and success.
- The younger generation (i.e. the Millennials) tends to actively pursue work-life "harmony"

## 5 KEY CONVERSATION TOPICS OR GESTURE TIPS

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- Travel and the Arts, as the Singaporeans are typically well travelled and cultured
- The modern economic advances and the architecture of Singapore
- The variety of foods and the excellent cuisine
- Your future plans, business success (without boasting), and personal interests
- To beckon someone, hold your hand out, palm downward, and make a scooping motion with the fingers. Beckoning someone with the palm up and wagging one finger will be interpreted as an insult

## 5 KEY CONVERSATION TOPICS OR GESTURE TABOOS

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- The personal life of another individual
- Bureaucracy, politics, and religion
- Legalities, crime, and punishment in Singapore. Spitting, smoking in public, chewing gum, and jaywalking are all offenses subject to fines
- Standing tall with your hands on your hips is typically perceived as an angry, aggressive stance
- It is considered rude to point at anyone with the forefinger. Instead, use your thumb).