

# BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



ENGLOBALLY  
GROUP



## INDONESIA

### WORKING HOURS

- Monday to Friday from 9 am to 5 pm.

### PUNCTUALITY

- Punctuality is not important to Indonesians. It is very common for Indonesians to arrive late.
- Time moves quite slowly and if you have an appointment for a meeting it is safe to assume that your host will be late.
- Even if you find this kind of mentality frustrating there is little that you can do about it as expecting people to hurry up is viewed as extremely rude.

### BUSINESS CLOTHING

- The business dress code in Indonesia is quite conservative and formal.
- Men usually wear suits /jackets, shirts and ties. If you are brave or already staying a long time in the country, then you can wear a traditional batik shirt (long-sleeved is preferable) and combine it with dark pants.
- Women should also wear conservative business clothes, such as a blouse, pant and jacket.
- Women need to realise that due to the large Muslim population their clothes should not be too revealing.

### GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Gift-giving is extremely common in Indonesia and can be critical in getting a business deal rolling, or the best terms possible. It is very important for your first impression towards the recipient and it can be a complicated process so it would be best to ask your local contact for advice on this matter.
  - It is considered polite to verbally refuse a gift before accepting it. This shows that the recipient is not greedy.
  - The tips above can seem quite alien, especially to western business people, but if you follow them you will find that your business trip goes a lot smoother.
- Offer gifts with the right hand only.
  - Wrap gifts in red, yellow or green paper or other bright colours as these bring good fortune.
  - Do not give leather products to a Hindu.
  - Do not give alcohol unless you are certain the recipient drinks.
  - Gifts are not opened when received.
  - Do not give gift to government officer in the common space (even in their office).



## BUSINESS MEALS

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- Dining etiquette is generally relaxed but depends on the setting and context. The more formal the occasion the more formal the behaviour. Below are some basic dining etiquette tips:
  - Wait to be shown to your place - as a guest you will have a specific position.
  - Food is often taken from a shared dish in the middle. You will be served the food and it would not be considered rude if you helped yourself after that.
  - If food is served buffet style then the guest is generally asked to help themselves first. It is considered polite that the guest insist others go before - him/her but this would never happen.
  - In formal situations, men are served before women.
  - Wait to be invited to eat before you start.
  - A fork and spoon are often the only utensils at the place setting. Depending on the situation some people may use their hands.
  - Eat or pass food with your right hand only.

## NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

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- Approx. 20 days.

## BUSINESS MEETINGS

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- Initial meetings may be more about getting-to-know-you rather than business. Do not be surprised if business is not even discussed. It is common for Indonesians to enter the meeting room according to rank. Although you do not have to do this, doing so would give a good impression.
  - Indonesians do not make hasty decisions because they might be viewed as not having given the matter sufficient consideration. Be prepared to exercise patience.
  - Jam Karet" (rubber time) describes the Indonesian approach to time. Things are not rushed as the attitude is that everything has its time and place. Time does not bring money, good relations and harmony do. If negotiating, avoid pressure tactics as they are likely to backfire.
  - Indonesians are indirect communicators. This means they do not always say what they mean. It is up to the listener to read between the lines or pay attention to gestures and body language to get the real message.
  - Generally speaking Indonesians speak quietly and with a subdued tone. Loud people would come across as slightly aggressive.
- Business is personal in Indonesia so spend time through communication to build a strong relationship. Dealing with someone face-to-face is the only effective way of doing business.
  - Indonesians abhor confrontation due to the potential loss of face. To be polite, they may tell you what they think you want to hear. If you offend them, they will mask their feelings and maintain a veil of civility. If an Indonesian begins to avoid you or acts coldly towards you, there is a serious problem.

## CONVERSATION

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- Good conversation topics include families, local communities, and food and places in Indonesia and your home country.
- Avoid discussions about politics, sex, material possessions, and the Chinese and don't say anything negative about Islam or Indonesia. Indonesians, and Javanese in particular, are often not very direct.
- They artfully talk about an issue by talking around it.

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

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- Indonesia ranks 50th in Expat Insider (2018).

## ADDRESSING A PERSON

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- Different ethnic groups address each using different names. To avoid confusion, ask a person how they want to be addressed. When addressing people for the first time, be polite, respectful, always use the formal terms, i.e. bapak for a man, ibu for a woman before their proper names. When meeting, Indonesians touch their heart in greeting, often after the handshake. It feels a bit awkward and pretentious to do this at first, but you get into the habit rather quickly and it is a respectful gesture when meeting officials.
- People are normally called by their first name, as in Mr Robert or Miss Susan, rather than using their last name.
- Selamat means peace and is a traditional greeting.
- "Yes, but" means no when someone is speaking to you.
- Never allow your voice to get loud, whether in anger or joy.
- Expressing anger in public through tone of voice, loudness, or body language is always inappropriate.
- Do not use red ink when writing, or having printing done (Chinese).