

# BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS



## MALAYSIA

### WORKING HOURS

- 8.30 am to 5.30 pm; or 9.00 am to 6.00 pm Mondays to Fridays

### PUNCTUALITY

- People generally are not very punctual. Being late for a meeting or appointment is quite normal.
- The lateness is usually blamed on traffic congestion because Kuala Lumpur is a big city like Toronto and constantly has traffic woes. But if a superior is a stickler for being punctual, staff will respect this and will try their utmost to be punctual.
- However, for reporting deadlines staff will more often than not turn in their work by the deadline.

### BUSINESS MEALS

- Business entertaining is a must. Put effort into establishing a personal relationship.
- Dining etiquette for using your hands. The left hand is considered taboo
- It should not be used for eating or handling food in any way or form.
- If you are hosting a meal, remember that your Muslim guests should not be offered either pork or alcohol. Similarly, Hindus and Sikhs should not be served beef, because cows are considered sacred in those religions. Dining etiquette for utensils.
- Malaysia is composed of a number of different ethnic groups, so utensil etiquette varies. Individuals of
- Malaysian and Indian descent may choose to use the fork as the scooper (using the left hand) and the spoon as the utensil that takes the food to the mouth (using the right hand).
- Some may use their hands (the right one only) to take food to their mouths.
- Follow the person with whom you are dining. Dining etiquette for seating.
- Seating should be dictated by the host or the highest Malaysian officer in attendance.
- The host should be seated to the immediate left of the most senior guest. This guest should be given the best seat at the table, which is usually the farthest from the door.
- Tipping is not the custom in Malaysia, because service charges are included in most services.

### WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Work-life balance is becoming increasingly valued, especially by millennials, who prefer flexible working hours and do not like long working hours. (Randstad work monitor Q1 2018)



## GIFTS AND PRESENTS

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- Gifts are usually reserved for friends. Before giving a gift of any kind, you must first establish a personal relationship with the recipient. Otherwise, the gift may very well be perceived as a bribe.
- The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency has exceptionally strict laws against bribery. Moreover, giving a gift that seems too generous may be interpreted as a bribe and could get you in trouble with the authorities.
- It's a good idea to select a modest, inexpensive gift so that the recipient won't feel obligated to you. Also, when receiving a gift, take care not to reciprocate with one of greater value compared to the present you received.
- Gifts are not opened in front of the giver. Opening presents alone allows both the giver and recipient to "save face." There is a cultural belief that the giver and recipient may be embarrassed if the gift turns out to be a poor choice.
- A gift should be received in both hands, palms facing upwards. You will be relieved that you arrived with gifts in hand when you are given a present unexpectedly. Nonetheless, it is best to check the company policy before giving gifts. It is becoming more of a norm for companies to implement a strict "no gift" policy.

## BUSINESS CLOTHING

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- The dress code culture here has become less conservative. Gone are the days when office workers must wear ties.
- The office dress code is becoming less formal. What matters most is that you look presentable and neat.
- As for ladies, one should avoid showing too much skin. This is to respect the Muslim practice here. As a matter of fact, when visiting government agencies, ladies are expected to stay away from tight skirts, low-cuts and sleeveless tops.
- On Fridays it is quite common to see companies embracing the business casual dress culture. Depending on your type of industry, there are companies that observe casual Fridays but one should not get too carried away. When in doubt just bear in mind that you are still dressing for work. So keep it casual but smart.
- That said there are still occasions when certain business events dictate the types of business wears. For instance, during boardroom meetings you are expected to turn up in a business suit with or without tie, while ladies can opt for a classy pantsuit or knee-length dress or skirt with blouse.

## BUSINESS MEETINGS

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- When making appointments for a business meeting, avoid (but not an absolute no when) scheduling them on Fridays, as this day is reserved for Muslims to pray. Arrive in time for a meeting but be prepared to wait.
  - Malays usually have a relaxed attitude to time. This means for you: be punctual. When having a first meeting with a party do not expect business decisions to be made.
  - Initial meetings are usually used for building rapport as business relationships are based on familiarity and trust. They are always started with small talk. Personal questions are not very adequate but questions on hobbies or interests, sometimes also on family, are fine.
- ### NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS
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- Approx. 14 days

## CONVERSATION

- Malaysians, irrespective of their ethnicity, normally like talking about family, food and sports.
- It is quite normal for someone to ask how many children you have and where is your spouse currently at or whether she is working.
- They will also be interested to know where you worked before and what type of work you have done and accomplished.
- Malaysians normally take deep pride in their country and will be deeply offended if they think foreigners look down on Malaysia as a backward, third world country.
- They will be extremely pleased if a foreigner has a certain amount of knowledge of the country and appreciates the local food and sports, particularly football and badminton.
- Malaysians, in general, have a good sense of humour and enjoy a good joke. Jokes should be something known internationally and not pertaining to North America.
- Firstly, it is important to note that Malaysia is a multicultural country. Malaysians are very friendly, but also reserved.
- During introductory greeting, a handshake is commonly practised. However, there are some conservative Malay women who will avoid any physical contact as it is deemed inappropriate.
- To be on the safe side, wait for the woman to reach out her hand first.
- Only then is it appropriate to shake it. If the woman does not extend her hand, only bow slightly with your hand placed over the position of your heart to demonstrate respect.
- Subjects that touch upon sexuality or religions that are not practised by Malaysians may be offensive.

## ADDRESSING A PERSON

- As a general rule, address persons by their title and their surname as using first names is not very common.
- As Malaysia is a multi-racial country, different ethnicity will have different ways of calling their surnames. For starters, Malays and Indians do not have surnames.
- They often use their father's name as a form of "surname" adding it to their given name. For ease of understanding, the table below will illustrate the usage of these terms;

Term	Malay	Indian
"Son of"	Abdul "bin" Rauf meaning Abdul "son of" Rauf.  The given name and surname are Abdul and Rauf respectively	Arumugam "a/l" Muthusamy; a/l denotes "anak lelaki" meaning  Arumugam "son of" Muthusamy  The given name and surname are Arumugam and Muthusamy respectively
"Daughter of"	Sarah "Binti" Abdullah meaning Sarah "daughter of" Abdullah	Trisha "a/p" Rajkumar; "a/p" denotes "daughter of" meaning Trisha "daughter of" Rajkumar

- For Chinese, the surname is always as the first name followed by the given name. For instance, the surname and given name for a Chinese male by the name of Wong Fei Hung are Wong and Fei Hung respectively.
- In Malaysia, the rule of thumb is to call the first name together with a "Mr" or "Ms". Using the examples above, you will address the Malay and Chinese males as Mr. Abdul and Mr. Wong respectively. Some Malaysians have been conferred a title by the government. These are usually "Tun", "Tan Sri", "Dato" and "Datuk". If you know the title, use it!

