

BUSINESS ETIQUETTES AND CUSTOMS

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VIETNAM

WORKING HOURS

- 8:00 am until 5:00 pm, Monday to Friday.

PUNCTUALITY

- The Vietnamese are punctual and expect others to be so, too

BUSINESS CLOTHING

- Dress conservatively in nice clothes. Suits for men and dresses or suits for women. During the warmer months, you can leave the suit jacket at home.
- Business attire in the southern part of Vietnam is more casual, and suit jackets are not often required.

GIFTS AND PRESENTS

- Business gift-giving is fairly common at the end of a meeting or during a meal in honour of your business associates. Gifts should be small but not expensive.
- Something with your company logo or something typical from your country both make excellent gifts.
- Do not wrap a gift in black paper because this colour is unlucky and associated with funerals in Vietnam.
- Gifts that symbolize cutting, such as scissors, knives and other sharp objects, should be avoided because they mean the cutting of the relationship.
- Vietnamese may or may not open these gifts when they are received; leave the option to them. You will also receive gifts and should defer to your host as to whether you should open it when received or not. Regardless of when it is opened or what it is, profuse thanks are always appropriate.

BUSINESS MEALS

- A small dish or shaker of white crystal on the table is more likely to be monosodium glutamate (MSG) than sugar or salt.
- The Vietnamese style of dining is chopsticks and rice bowls.
- Hold your rice bowl in your hand; it is considered lazy to eat from a rice bowl that is on the table.
- The host may serve guests, but will usually just invite everyone to begin helping themselves.
- Food is placed on dishes in the centre of the table from which each person helps him/herself.
- An offer of tea at a reception or meeting is a ritual form of hospitality and should not be refused.

ADDRESSING A PERSON

- When greeting someone, say "xin chao" (seen chow) + "toi ten la" (My name is) + given name.
- The Vietnamese are delighted if a Westerner can properly say "xin chao" (because Vietnamese is a tonal language, "xin chao" can have six different meanings, only one of which is "Hello").



BUSINESS MEETING

- It can be rare for people to arrange any meetings too far in advance. In all likelihood, a businessman will only have appointments for no more than the seven days immediately to come.
- Even then, the appointment should be re-confirmed a couple of days before it is due to take place. It does create some problems planning life outside work at times.
- Both parties in a meeting are likely to want to know who will be attending the meeting and be properly prepared for it. If a meeting is at the "other sides' office" then in all likelihood all the other participants will already be there and seated before a visitor or visitors enter.
- The leader of the visitors will be first and after a handshake there will be an invitation for everyone to sit down. If groups are in a line across the table from each other, they will be seated in a defined order, senior down to junior.
- Although all meetings are formal, proceedings will be opened with small talk. Once everyone is ready, the leader of the hosts will speak; just a short welcome to which the head of the visitors will respond. It is important that no member of a team expresses anything in conflict with what another has said.
- The spokesman for a team may not be the leader but it is the leader of the other side that must be directly addressed.
- Proposals are commonly made in broad terms before each issue is discussed point by point. Business card exchange often plays a part in the introductions before a meeting. If a card is two-sided and the meeting is between people of different languages, then one side will be in Vietnamese or English and the other the native language.
- Ideally, a card will also include a personal photograph as an additional aid to recognition. If you are combining business with a Vietnam travel package, be prepared. Enjoy your tour in Vietnam and your business meeting. If there are several members of the opposite team, then each of them should be given a card though the senior person should be given one first.
- Remember formality and that means cards, especially to important people, should be handed over with both hands. In team meetings, it is just the other team's leader that will expect this formality.
- Everyone receiving a card should read it carefully and absorb the details; it may well help during the meeting.
- It is not given simply to be immediately put in a pocket. When there is a meeting involving a large number of people, the card exchange is likely to be just between the leaders of each team; others can exchange cards afterwards.

CONVERSATION

- Good topics for casual conversations are sports (mainly soccer, which is called "football" in Vietnam), foods, movies, TV shows, high tech gadgets and global breaking news. Since Vietnam is a communist country where freedom of speech is still limited,
- Vietnamese politics may not be a good topic to start with your new Vietnamese friends. They may be reluctant to talk about it, seeing it as a taboo, or sometimes, just don't have enough sufficient knowledge in the topic.
- Avoid tag questions! Due to the habit of using Vietnamese language structure, your Vietnamese colleagues will answer "Yes" to a question such as; "This solution isn't good enough, is it?" even though what they actually mean is "Yes, I agree that the solution is not good enough".
- Such re-wording as "Do you agree that this solution is not good enough?" will help to remove the potential confusion.
- A smile does not always mean happiness. A Vietnamese smile can also mean:
 - "Hi"
 - "I'm trying to look friendly"
 - "I'm feeling embarrassed"
 - "I'm sorry that I did something wrong"
- Summoning someone with a curled index finger, as is done in the West, is only done by the boss. To beckon someone, extend your arm, palm down, and move your fingers in a scratching motion. Only beckon someone who has a "lower" status than you.
- Men and women do not show affection in public. However, some young women may hold hands while walking.
- Always use both hands when passing an object to another person. Touching children on the head is only done by parents, grandparents, etc.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- Vietnam has made considerable progress since 2015-2016, making large gains in the Working Abroad Index (from 36th to 12th place) and the Ease of Settling Index (35th to 29th place).

NATIONAL PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

- Approx. 10 days

