



# Global Etiquette

By Maralyn D. Hill

International behavior awareness makes your travel more pleasurable, whether business or personal. My interest piqued on this topic in the 80s when traveling to S.E. Asia, while working on my Master's degree. I continued to ask, read and learn more on the topic. It is our hope with this monthly column to cover dining etiquette, gestures, gifting, greetings, and customs in general.

It is my hope that our readers will share some of their own experiences, as that is what really brings the importance of this issue to life. Etiquette could can make

or break a business deal or social connection.

We also know several consultants who teach etiquette and protocol courses and hope they will contribute to this column in the future.

Etiquette and customs vary from culture to culture, state to state, as well as within generations. Dining etiquette has as many variables and gestures require a great deal of knowledge or caution.

Manners were drilled into my head from the time I was a small child. So let's start with gestures, as that is where I made my greatest faux pas. I talk with my hands a lot and never thought much about doing so.

It was in the early 90s and I was in Fortaleza, Brazil, meeting with the Governor of Ceara. My goal was to bring some Brazilian and American investors together. There were about fourteen of us in the room including a reporter and cameraman. The two-hour plus meeting went so well, we were all happy. Fortunately,

the press had just left when we were breaking up and I gave the classic American okay sign—thumb and forefinger forming a circle and the other fingers pointing up.

The look on everyone's face was shock and my interpreter appeared horrified. As she explained to me, this was equivalent to an insulting sign meaning "your anus" or f--- you. My face turned beet red. She went on to explain the American meaning, and everybody except me laughed. I was just glad that the photo in the newspaper the next day was not of my giving the Governor the finger. This is viewed the same in most Latin countries and France. I try very hard not to use gestures now.

Another common gesture is the two fingers V for victory sign. While visiting Australia, President George W. Bush was trying to indicate the peace sign. However, since his palm was facing inward instead of outward, it was equivalent in the US to giving one the third finger. This is also true in the U.K.

Holding one finger up is considered

one of the most offensive hand gestures worldwide. The upward pointing middle finger is viewed as obscene. Some Arab and Mediterranean countries consider holding the index finger up to be the same obscene gesture.

There are many other gestures that can embarrass you. This is just a start. Feel free to share your experiences with us. It's much more interesting when you know the circumstances surrounding the experience, do please share. Now I usually hold a pen in my hand, but I'll never forget my biggest faux pas.



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