

# Global Etiquette Hand and Greetings World

By Maralyn D. Hill

**M**any of us have heard the expression, "You have one chance to make a first impression." Your handshake and/or greeting are part of that impression. I cannot begin to cover all countries, so I will cover what I know. In addition, times have changed and new customs are being introduced. That does not necessarily mean they are being adopted.

My references have included "Do's and Taboos Around the World," "Modern Manners," as well as numerous articles I've read and experiences I've encountered. Some conflict, so I'd personally go with the lead of my host, to whom I'm being introduced. I've gone with my experience.

## Handshakes

There is a new modified handshake called "fist bumps." Scientists claim it is the most hygienic and recommend it. Will it catch on? I'm not counting on it. Customs and traditions play a huge role in greetings and I'd pick the choice of following my host's lead.

In the **United States**, a woman or man may offer their hand first for a handshake. However, on a global basis, a woman offers her hand first.

**Algeria, Ghana, Hong Kong, and Kenya** – Both when meeting and departing, a handshake is in order.

**Australia** – A good hearty handshake is welcome.

**Bolivia and Uruguay** – Handshaking is common.

**Austria, Canada and Switzerland** – Firm handshakes are usual on meeting and departing with good eye contact.

**Caribbean** – In general, shaking hands on meeting and leaving is practiced.

**China** – Handshakes are acceptable and a slight bow is appreciated. Age

and rank matter and the most senior are introduced first. Someone may introduce themselves with full name, full titles, and company name. If that happens, you should do the same. Be sure to wait for the Chinese to offer their hand. They may avert their eyes as a sign of respect and you may receive applause.

**Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Norway and Sweden** – Shake hands on meeting and leaving with a firm brief handshake and eye contact.

**Germany** – Brief firm handshakes for all, both greeting and leaving. Be sure not to have one hand in pocket. Italy – Handshaking and gesturing are done by most, as well as using titles if someone has one. A man waits for a woman to offer her hand.

**The Gulf States (Bahrain, Kuwait, Sultanate of Oman, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates) and Saudi Arabia** – Usually, they say "salaam alaykum," then shake hands and say "kaif halak." The host may put his left hand on your right shoulder and kiss you on both cheeks or take your hand and hold it as your walk. It is considered an insult to pull your hand away sharply, as holding on is a sign of friendship. Lingering handshakes are to be expected. Women are not included in this exchange.

**Ivory Coast, Morocco, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia** – Handshaking is the custom.

**Luxembourg and The Netherlands** – Be sure to have a light handshake coming and going with everyone, while keeping eye contact.

**Malaysia** – Shaking hands is common among men, but not as frequent between men and women.

**New Zealand** – Handshakes on meeting and leaving are appropriate. If women are present, wait for them to offer

their hand first.

**Russia** – Generally, a Russian will state his name and shake hands during a first meeting. When greeting friends, there may be hugging and cheek kissing.

**The Philippines** – A handshake for men and women. Sometimes, a pat on the back for men.

**Singapore** – The handshake is the most common. Among Orientals, they may make a slight bow.

**Taiwan** – For acquaintances and friends, a handshake is usual. When meeting someone for the first time, a nod of the head does it.

**United Kingdom** – People generally greet with handshakes. However, not firm handshakes like the U.S. A lighter handshake is appreciated.

Hugs, Kisses, Etc.

**Argentina** – Men tend to hug each other and women with shake hands using both hands, while kissing on the cheek.

**Belgium** – Cheek kissing is done three times, as you alternate cheeks. You also shake hands when greeting and departing. Be sure to have good eye contact.

**Brazil** – Brazilians frequently embrace on the street, shake hands on meeting and leaving, and women meeting exchange kisses cheek to cheek and kissing the air or light cheek kisses. It is quite common for Brazilians to stand quite close and touch the person. Handshakes may linger.

**Chile** – On first introduction, a handshake is usual, with a kiss on the right cheek. Male Chileans may give another male a hug and women usually kiss each other on the cheek.

**Colombia** – Men will shake hands with everyone when entering or leaving.

Women usually avoid shaking hands, instead, they clasp forearms.

**Costa Rica** – Men shake hands and women kiss each other once on the cheek.

**Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico** – Handshake for first meeting, women who are close friends kiss on the cheek and men embrace.

**El Salvador** – Handshaking usual, but some just nod.

**Fiji** – A smile and raised eyebrows are your greeting, but handshakes are appropriate.

**France** – Use a brief and light handshake with everyone when greeting and leaving. A man might present his hand to a woman, and kiss the top of her hand. Friends and family usually hug and kiss both cheeks.

**Greece** – Almost anything goes. The Greeks may kiss or offer a firm handshake at every meeting.

**India** – Whereas men shake hands with men on meeting and leaving, not women. Men should place palms together and bow slightly and not touch a woman or talk to one who is alone in public.

**Indonesia** – Shaking hands with a nod of the head is proper for first time introductions.

**Japan** – No handshake, just a slight bow of the head, is appropriate for Westerners. If you are dealing with a Western-educated Japanese individual, you will probably be greeted with a handshake and eye contact.

**Nicaragua** – Smile, shake hands, close friends embrace and pat back. Women generally give a slight hug and kiss each other on the cheek.

# Handshakes Worldwide

**Pakistan** – Handshakes are common, but close friends embrace. A man should not touch or shake hands with a woman in public. Be sure not to give or receive anything with your left hand.

**Panama** – Friends nod and embrace, with shaking hands appropriate among business associates.

**Paraguay** – People stand very close, men frequently embrace and women kiss each other on both cheeks.

**Peru** – Shake hands when meeting and leaving. Men will frequently give close friends a hug and women friends often will kiss on the cheek.

**Portugal** – Men tend to hug and slap each other's back enthusiastically. For women who are close acquaintances, a kiss on both cheeks is common.

**Puerto Rico** – Shake hands, but close friends frequently embrace. Women tend to grasp each other's shoulders and kiss each other on the cheek. Puerto Ricans stand quite close while talking.

**Sri Lanka** – A light handshake and do not to give or receive anything with your left hand.

**South Africa** – Handshaking, talking and backslapping all go together.

**South Korea** – Men bow slightly to each other while shaking hands, using both hands or the right hand. Women nod, and in general, do not shake hands, and especially not with men.

**Spain** – Men who are friends will frequently hug, while women will give a slight embrace and kiss on each cheek.

**Tahiti** – Most shake hands on meeting. Tahitians normally kiss on the cheeks during greeting.

**Thailand** – The Thai tradition is the “wai,” made when you place both hands together in a prayer position at the chest. However, if you are in a Westernized social setting, handshaking may take place. Wait for the person in charge to initiate the process.

**Venezuela** – Men greet with a hug and women with an embrace and kiss on the cheek. Shaking hands is also common.

## Names

**Bangladesh** – With men, shake hands (not as firm as U.S.), when introduced to a woman, nod and speak a greeting. Be sure not to give or receive anything with your left hand.

**Finland** – Better to use names for greetings. Avoid invading space.

**Iceland** – Greet with first names.

**Israel** – “Shalom” is the accepted greeting.

In advance, I apologize if I have left out a particular country or not covered a custom as accurately as it could be explained. For the sake of space, I minimized descriptions. The main purpose of this article is to broaden your awareness of different customs of different cultures. Some cultures are uncomfortable if you are too close and others like to get up close. The better we can understand each other, the better we can communicate. I certainly would look forward to any comments you might have on aspects I may have overlooked or situations you've encountered. Just send your letter to [luxebeatmag@gmail.com](mailto:luxebeatmag@gmail.com)  
Subject Line: Letter to Editor.