

Bolivia Cultural Etiquette



Meeting and Greeting

- The customary greeting is a handshake. Shake hands when meeting and departing.
- Close male friends may embrace. Female friends embrace and touch cheeks.

Body Language

- Bolivians stand very close when conversing.
- You will be viewed as untrustworthy if you do not maintain direct eye contact.
- Correct posture while sitting and standing will be noticed. A slumping posture is rude.
- The “so-so” gesture (rocking your palm-down open hand from side to side) means “no” in Bolivia.

Corporate Culture

- Although punctuality is not a high priority in Bolivia, visitors should be punctual for business meetings. However, meetings rarely start on time.
- Take the time to get to know your Bolivian customers and colleagues. Personal relationships are vital to corporate success.
- Deadlines are not considered important.
- More than one meeting may be necessary to negotiate and close a deal. Plan on making several trips to complete business transaction, since face-to-face communication is preferred over phone calls, faxes and e-mail.
- The pace of business negotiations is generally much slower than in the United States. Never attempt to rush a deal. Applying pressure may cause a deal to fail. Remain low key.
- Hire a local contact to assist you in the Bolivian business community. Third-party contacts will be vital to your success.
- A contract is not finished until an agreement is reached on all parts. Each part is subject to re-negotiation until the entire contract is signed.

Dining and Entertainment

- It is impolite to show up on time to a social occasion. Guests are expected to be 15 to 30 minutes late for dinner or parties.

- Decline the first offer of food; wait until your host insists.
- Never touch food or eat anything with your fingers. Even fruit is eaten with a fruit knife and fork.
- It is polite to eat everything on your plate. Complimenting the food will be viewed as a request for more food. Wait until the dinner is over if you don't want more.
- Stay at least 30 minutes to one hour after dinner is finished.
- The host usually insists on paying for the meal in a restaurant.

Dress

- Men: In La Paz, a dark, three-piece suit is best. A lightweight suit is more common in Santa Cruz. Follow your Bolivian colleague's lead with regard to wearing ties and removing jackets in the summer.
- Women: suits, dresses, skirts and blouses.
- Do not wear shorts in cities.

Gifts

- A gift given sincerely will be appreciated regardless of the value. The intention is what counts.
- The recipient may not open gifts until after the giver has left.
- Gifts from the United States, particularly from your region, are appreciated.
- Give your hostess flowers, wine, whiskey and high quality chocolates. Don't give yellow or purple flowers. Bring a bag of assorted American candy (Tootsie Pops, candy bars, etc.) for the children. It will be very well received.
- Give your colleagues high quality pen and pencil sets, office organizers, books and art from the United States and your home region. If your company logo is on a gift, it should be small and understated.

Helpful Hints

- Know something about Bolivian sports. It will be appreciated.
- Don't talk about poverty, religion, drugs or the United States' drug policy. The United States' military activity in Bolivia is a sore spot with many citizens.
- Do not give political opinions on Bolivia.
- Never praise Chile, Brazil or Paraguay. Bolivia has lost wars with and land to all its neighbors.

- Make an effort to use Spanish in conversation. It will be appreciated.
- Bolivians appreciate people who are warm and friendly.

Epecially for Women

- Machismo is very strong in Bolivia, and women are considered subordinate. This puts severe restrictions on women's social and work behavior.
- When doing business with Bolivian men, emphasize your credentials and experience.

Resource: http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_bo.htm