

# Brazil Cultural Etiquette



## Meeting and Greeting

- Take time to greet and say good-bye to each person present.
- Women kiss twice -- once on each cheek -- if they are married. Single women add a third kiss.

## Body Language

- Physical contact is part of simple communication. Touching arms, elbows and backs is very common and acceptable. Brazilians also stand extremely close to one another. Do not back away.
- The "O.K." sign is considered very rude and vulgar; the "thumbs up" gesture is used for approval.
- Wiping your hands together means "it doesn't matter."
- Clicking the tongue and shaking the head indicates disagreement or disapproval.

## Corporate Culture

- Your personality and ability to establish strong personal and business relationships is important to the success of your business endeavor.
- Brazilians will do anything for friends, hence the expression: "For friends, everything. For enemies, the law." Relationships are more important than a legal document in business.
- Meetings are conducted at a casual, unhurried pace. Don't get right down to business. Engage in conversation first.
- Doing business with Brazilians requires face to face communication. You will be able to do only limited business by phone, fax or e-mail.
- Some facts may not be completely accurate during the early stages of business negotiations. Brazilians expect some initial hype and will passionately argue their points, slowly and grudgingly making concessions. Try to maintain consistency in your negotiating team.
- Always get a written agreement with starting date, time of delivery, payment details, etc. Bill in advance.
- Presentations should be expressive and have some flair.
- Stay at a first-class hotel. Appearances count.

- Hire a Brazilian contact (a despachante) from your industry to introduce you to the right people. He or she will be invaluable to your success.
- Hire a local accountant and a lawyer to help you with contract issues. Brazilians may resent an outside legal representative.
- Make appointments two weeks in advance. Don't "drop in" on business or government offices without an appointment.
- Do not plan to make a business visit or schedule any appointments during holidays or festivals.

### **Dining and Entertainment**

- Always entertain in a prestigious restaurant.
- Be prepared for lengthy meals (two hours or more for lunch). Do not discuss business during meals unless your host brings it up. Business may occasionally be discussed at dinner in São Paulo or Rio.
- Brazilians always wash their hands before eating and rarely touch food with their hands. Use a knife and fork for everything, even fruit. Always use a napkin while eating or drinking.
- Using toothpicks in public is not acceptable unless you cover your mouth with your other hand.
- When inviting Brazilians to dinner or a party, do not suggest that your guests bring food or drink. Do not expect them to arrive on time, and never indicate a time that the party will "end."
- To beckon a waiter, hold up the index finger of your right hand and quietly say "Garçon." To request the check, say "A conta, por favor." Waiters generally don't bring checks until they are requested.

### **Dress**

- Appearance counts. Your clothing will reflect upon you and your company.
- Brazilian women dress "sexy" in all situations, whether business, formal or casual. Foreign women who want to blend in should avoid wearing overly formal, conservative attire.
- Shoes should be stylish, polished and well-kept. Nails should be manicured.
- In business situations, men should wear conservative dark suits, shirts and ties. Three piece suits indicate executives; two piece suits indicate office workers. Women should wear feminine dresses, suits and pantsuits and avoid "dressing like a man."

## Gifts

- Gifts are not important in establishing a business relationship, and people won't expect gifts in the first few contacts. A very expensive gift may be viewed as a bribe.
- Present a gift at a social meeting, not during a formal business meeting.
- Give good quality whiskey, wine, coffee table books and name brand pens. Gifts for your counterpart's children will be appreciated.
- Send flowers before or after visiting someone's home for dinner.

## Helpful Hints

- Don't assume that the "self-made" businessperson is admired in Brazil. Inherited wealth and a good family background are much more desirable.
- Brazilians are extremely casual about time. Being ten to fifteen minutes late in business is normal, and twenty to thirty minutes late is not unusual. Be on time for a formal meeting, but prepare to wait for your Brazilian colleagues.
- Soccer (football), family, Brazil's beautiful beaches and the country's rapid growth are all appropriate conversation topics. Politics, poverty, religion, Argentina (considered a rival) and the deforestation of Brazil are not. Personal topics such as age, salary and marital or job status are also unacceptable.
- Brazilians are expressive and passionate conversationalists. Be prepared to be interrupted.
- Don't smoke in public. Federal law bans smoking in public places.
- Don't refer to Brazilians as Latins.

## Especially for Women

As women increasingly join the workforce, machismo has become less common. Younger, better-educated women have values that correspond closely to those of North American women. Women are well-accepted and are prominent in education, medicine and journalism and as small business owners.

- Brazilian women are very aggressive, in both their business and personal lives.
- Foreign women will usually have no problem doing business in Brazil. However, some people are still conservative in this regard.

- Be very careful not to ruin a business deal by being cool and too professional.
- It is traditional to invite someone for a drink after work. This is not a come-on.

### Especially for Men

Brazilian women can be very aggressive romantically and forward to the point of harassment. Don't be surprised if you are in a restaurant or nightclub and a woman sends you a note asking for your phone number — even if you are with your wife or girlfriend. Foreign men traveling to Brazil should be very cautious when dealing with Brazilian women. If you don't want the attention, be cordial but keep your distance. Don't be overly friendly.

Resource: [http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural\\_etiquette/ce\\_br.htm](http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_br.htm)