

Chile Cultural Etiquette



Meeting and Greeting

- Chileans are very warm and expect visitors to reciprocate. They may be formal at first, but move to friendship very quickly.
- A handshake, a warm hug and one kiss on the right cheek are common greetings among friends.
- Always greet the head of the household or most senior person first.

Body Language

- Chileans stand closer than North Americans do. Do not back away.
- Never click your fingers to or at anyone.
- Never beckon with your index finger.
- A chin flick means "I couldn't care less." Educated people do not use this gesture.
- Hitting the palm of your left hand with your right fist is considered a vulgar gesture.

Corporate Culture

- The business atmosphere in Chile is more formal than in the rest of South America.
- Punctuality is generally respected and expected in business. However, be prepared for Chileans to be thirty minutes late.
- Chileans don't like to feel pressured or rushed. Business may be conducted more slowly than in Europe and North America.
- Expertise is less important than your personal, family and company background. Family and friendship play a big role in business, and whom one knows is important. Red tape can be minimized considerably if you have the right connections.
- Establish rapport first. Personal relationships are vital to doing business in Chile. Some light conversation is customary before getting down to business.
- Decision-making is centralized and decisions are made at the top level, although all levels have input. Visit top-level executives first. Mid-level executives can follow up on subsequent visits.
- Be prepared to always go through a secretary. Secretaries are screeners for their bosses.

- It is preferable to conduct business face-to-face rather than over the phone or via fax. Be prepared to take several trips to finish a business transaction.
- It is acceptable, but not yet common, to communicate via e-mail; don't expect a quick response.
- Businesslike behavior with a bit of humor is appreciated. Do not attempt a hard sell approach, and avoid aggressive behavior.
- Expect to be interrupted. This is not considered rude, but rather a way of showing interest and enthusiasm.
- Present a well-organized plan with terms clearly defined and financial obligations and options clearly stated.
- Chileans are straightforward about negotiations. Feelings and emotion are important in negotiation.
- Always get written confirmation of agreements.
- Stay at a top-notch hotel; you will be judged by your accommodations.

Dining and Entertainment

- Business lunches are usually long and are held in restaurants, hotels or residences.
- Correct European-style table manners are vital. It is very important to know which flatware to use. Forks and knives should be used for everything eaten at a table.
- Keep both hands above the table at all times, never on your lap.
- Don't lick your fingers or use toothpicks — both are considered vulgar.
- Water is not automatically served at the table. If you want water, ask for it.
- Taste everything that is served. Compliment the host or hostess on the meal.
- Conversation is free, friendly and open at the table, but be careful not to speak with food in your mouth.
- Never leave immediately after dinner. Stay for conversation after the meal.
- An invitation for drinks at a private home generally includes dinner. Guests should reciprocate with comparable hospitality at a later time.
- There are no separate checks. The person who invites pays. Arrange in advance to pay the bill in a restaurant if you are the host. You will not be presented with a bill in a restaurant until you ask for it.
- Always arrive late for social functions. Being fifteen to thirty minutes late for dinner and thirty minutes late for a party is customary.

Dress

- Appearance is important to Chileans who favor sophisticated European styles. It is important to be neatly and cleanly dressed for all occasions.
- Men should wear jackets regardless of where they are or how hot it is. Conservative, dark suits should be worn for business.
- Women should wear dresses and suits for business. Bare legs are acceptable with dresses.
- Chilean women do not favor overtly sexy clothing.

Gifts

- Business gifts are not expected until a relationship is formed.
- Expensive, flashy gifts may cause awkwardness. Tastes are conservative.
- Give leather appointment books, quality pens, cigarette lighters, office accessories, a clock or liquor.
- Open gifts immediately in front of the giver.
- Bring a bouquet of flowers to the hostess, or send flowers in advance of a party. Give wine, chocolates, local crafts from your home, small porcelain pieces or an art object to hang on a wall. Gifts for children are appreciated.

Helpful Hints

- Do not make comparisons between the United States and Chile.
- Show interest in and talk about family, especially children.
- Do not talk about politics or human rights, especially as a foreigner, unless your host initiates the discussion.
- When smoking, offer a cigarette to everyone. Chileans have a saying for those who neglect to share: "Did you learn to smoke in jail?"

Especially for Women

Traditionally, men have dominated private and public life in Chile. However, attitudes are changing at home and in the workplace. Women now make up 30% of the labor. In addition, many women hold important political and business positions as ministers and top executives.

- Chile is an easier place for women to conduct business than other parts of South America. However, businesswomen may still encounter a machismo ethic.
- Typical North American businesswomen are often viewed as cold, pushy and non-feminine.
- Men almost always pay the bill in a restaurant and may be embarrassed if a woman attempts to pay. This shouldn't be pressed. Don't argue. If it is important for you to pay, make arrangements in advance.
- It is common for men to stare at women. It is harmless and meant to flatter.

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