

# 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](http://www.ediplomat.com/np/cultural_etiquette/ce_cl.htm)