



THE AZIZ CORPORATION

Top tips for Cultural Sensitivity

When you embark on a business trip overseas, it's natural to feel a little bit nervous. You might not understand the language or the customs. That's why this month we are offering some tips on cultural sensitivity.

1. **Get the introduction right.** It's best to err on the side of formality, as many cultures don't use first names at work. And if you don't know how to pronounce words correctly, make sure to ask your foreign contacts for assistance.
2. **Dress for the occasion.** What you wear forms a large part of peoples' first impressions. You might like to "dress down on Friday" but other business cultures might not be so relaxed.
3. **Watch your gestures!** Since gestures have different meanings in different parts of the world, they can be a real cause of confusion. A quick "thumbs-up" in most parts of the Middle East, for example, will seriously offend your host!
4. **Only joking!** Watch the humour - jokes rarely translate well. Between the language barrier and the cultural obstacles, you may find that you are the only one laughing.
5. **Cheers!** You may be a fully paid-up member of the Temperance Society, but in some cultures, consuming alcohol may be an expected part of doing business.
6. **A token of appreciation.** Giving a gift may be expected in some countries, but could be construed as a bribe in others. And if you do give a gift, beware that it doesn't have an unlucky association - a bunch of chrysanthemums will not go down well in France, as they are associated with death.
7. **Let's talk about sex . . .** In an ideal world, gender shouldn't matter in a business situation. In reality, there are many parts of the world where the idea of a woman in business is unusual. Women may find themselves being ignored in a business context, or conversely, receiving too much (unwanted!) attention.
8. **Table Manners.** Sharing a meal with your business contact is both a necessary and pleasant part of your trip. Take the opportunity to be adventurous and enjoy the local cuisine, but be aware that different cultures have different etiquettes. Take your lead from your host.
9. **Here's my card.** Presenting your card in the U.K is generally a relaxed affair. In some parts of Asia, though, the card should be treated with respect and honour and you should take time to read it.
10. **Time is of the essence.** Attitudes towards punctuality vary from one culture to another. Being late for a business appointment in Germany or Japan is likely to be considered very rude, but people in many Latin countries have a much more relaxed attitude.