



COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY ASSOCIATION

Guide to Indian Social Etiquettes & Customs

“Atithi Devo Bhava” (Guest is God) is the mantra for Indians while dealing with Guests.

Naming conventions

- Naming conventions in India reflect India’s cultural diversity and may vary from region to region.
- If in doubt, it is always best to ask.
- It is considered appropriate to address an elder/superior as ‘Sir’ or ‘Madam’ or ‘Ma’am’.

Meeting & Greeting

- Saying 🙏 *'namaste'* with your hands together in a prayer gesture is considered a respectful Hindu greeting. For Muslims, it is *'salaam alaikum'* ('peace be with you' and the response is *'alaikum salaam'*). This is often overlooked in urban areas and “Good Morning/Good Afternoon/Good Evening/Good Night, Sir/Madam” also suffices.
- In urban areas, shaking hands is the accepted norm. Avoid hugging when first meeting someone or getting intimate if the person is unknown to you.
- Elders and superiors are usually greeted first in accordance with cultural norms.

Communication Style

- Avoid standing too close to others, unless unavoidable.
- Generally, the right hand is used for eating and shaking hands.

- **Snapping/ pointing your fingers at someone is considered rude and bad manners in India.**
- **Talking loudly in public places should be avoided.**
- **Head/hands are often used to point or direct someone's attention.**
- **Avoid touching anyone with your feet. It is considered disrespectful.**

Personal Space

- **Public display of affection (PDAs) is not encouraged.**
- **As a courtesy, it is best to ask before taking the pictures of people, sacred sites or ceremonies.**

Eating

- **Indian food often does not require cutlery to eat except at formal lunches/dinners.**
- **Usually the right hand is used to serve food.**
- **There is a general distinction between northern and southern Indian food. Generally the food is spicy.**
- **Some Indians may have dietary restrictions based on their religious faith. For example, practising Muslim Indians do not consume pork. For many Hindus, cows have sacred religious connotations, and the consumption of beef should be avoided.**
- **It is common for many Indians to abstain from drinking alcohol for reasons such as religion or their upbringing. Only offer or provide alcohol if you are certain that your Indian counterpart drinks it.**
- **Sharing of food is considered good manners, and it is common in restaurants to order a number of dishes and share between the members of your party.**
- **Street food in India is also famous though it tends to be spicy and greasy**

General Safety Measures

- **Be mindful of your personal belongings especially mobile phones, wallets in public places/crowded places.**
- **Keep your conversations brief with unknown persons in public areas.**
- **It is considered polite to remove your shoes before entering homes and places of worship.**
- **Smoking and drinking in public places is banned in Delhi.**