

## **Argentina: Cultural Tips**

To conduct business in Argentina, it is necessary to obtain third party introductions through institutions such as law firms, consulting firms or banks.

Should you need to reach a decision maker, you must go through his or her personal assistant or secretary first. Politeness is essential when dealing with these intermediaries as they determine the order in which visitors get access to their bosses.

There is usually at least a week or two delay so it is better to schedule appointments with these periods of time in mind. Working hours differ: in Buenos Aires [the capital] people in decision-making positions may work non-stop from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm with a short break for lunch at 1.00 pm [which may often be turned into a business lunch]. In the provinces, managers start earlier and stop at 12:30 to 1:00 pm and resume work at 4:00 to 4:30 pm to finish at 7:30 to 8:00 pm.

**Punctuality**: It is appreciated and expected from visitors to Argentina for all business related occasions. However, you may find your Argentine counterpart to be 15 to 20 minutes late! Guests to home invitations are expected to show up some 15 minutes late. For a dinner party, guests can arrive even 30 minutes late.

January and February are **holiday months**. It may be unwise to try to do business in these summer months.

**Fixed holidays**: January 1, Easter, May 1 [Labour Day], May 25, July 9, December 25.

**Movable holidays**: April 2 [Sovereignty Day], June 20 [Flag Day], August 17 [San Martin's Death], October 12 [Columbus Day].

Argentina uses the Decimal System of weights and measures [1KM=0.62 miles].

**Government offices**: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm [check for precise times].

**Shopping Malls**: Mon through Sun 10:00 am to 10:00 pm.

**Banks in Buenos Aires**: Mon through Fri 10:00 am to 3:00 pm.

**Banks in the provinces**: Mon thru Fri 8:00 to 1:00 pm [check schedules in each case].

Argentine businesspeople are formal and conservative regarding style and colours. They prefer to dress well and to follow European designs. Business casual is not perceived as appropriate in Argentina. For men, blue, grey and brown suits, white or light blue shirts and conservative ties are the norm. Women also prefer suits in blue or pastel colours with black or brown shoes made of leather.

Wearing light colours is not recommended as this is not the tropical country misinformed people may assume. Regarding wardrobe matters, imitate your Argentine counterparts to promote the comfort necessary for acceptance and eventual friendship. Avoid eye-catching accessories, and wear only discreet jewellery.

For dinner parties or restaurant outings, men wear a suit and tie and women elegant, conservative dresses. You might dress more casually in the summer, in which slacks and short-sleeved shirts for men and more casual dresses for ladies are prevalent. Avoid wearing shorts.

Argentines believe they should be frank, open and direct, but they are proud of being diplomatic. For them, it is important not to offend, so sometimes they might be indirect when speaking but they are not trying to be confusing, but rather amiable and tactful. Argentines are well informed and proud of having the latest, most precise information. They are warm, and they tend to get closer and touch while speaking. Shaking hands is normal when being introduced, but after that don't be embarrassed when you see two men kissing when they meet, as it has become common practice.

The family is still the centre of life in Argentina and therefore is a great subject of conversation together with travel, sports, food and wine [the Cuyo Region produces some of the finest wines in the world], sports, the arts, the country's landscapes.

Argentines are not overly patriotic but they will take offence at negative comments about the country as a whole.

Show interest in what you hear, ask questions and let your companions elaborate on what they have to say about the topic at hand. They love sports like football, rugby, polo, tennis and enjoy talking about famous Argentine sportsmen who stand out in these fields. Argentines have a vast cultural life, have obtained five Noble Prizes, and are knowledgeable about the latest in literature, films, and art. Tango, the urban national music, is highly appreciated. There are tango ball rooms [milongas] that are worth visiting.

In Buenos Aires, the tango takes a starring role, as it is the rhythm that represents its culture.

Avoid talking about local or international politics, neighbouring countries, and the Malvinas [Falkland] conflict. Some businesses will not favour conversations about human rights violations.

Remember: Argentines are vehement speakers, and frequently interrupt one another. Don't take offence if you are interrupted, as it is a sign of participation and interest.

Address people by using the titles Señor [Mr], Señora [Mrs], Señorita [Miss] followed by surnames.

Physicians and lawyers are addressed as 'doctor' followed by surnames.

When a woman marries she adds her husband's surname preceded by 'de' but keeps her father's surname: Julia Pérez de Larrea.

'Tuteo' [calling people 'che' or 'vos' instead of 'usted' when addressing people] comes after some period of mutual trust and friendship.

In a business context, choose gifts that will not be perceived as a form of bribery: inexpensive but in good taste with a recognition of the receiver's preferences and likings.

Ensure the gift is properly wrapped and has a card enclosed.

When visiting an Argentine home, flowers [red, white roses], chocolates for the hostess and a well selected bottle of wine for the host are your best choices.

Third party introductions are often a necessary prelude to doing business in Argentina.

Have your business card translated into Spanish on the reverse side. Bring a plentiful supply of cards to exchange--customarily after the initial handshake.

Smile and make eye contact when receiving cards and take a few moments to look at your counterpart's business card after it is handed to you.

In Argentine business culture, interpersonal skills such as the ability to 'fit in' and maintain cordial relations with the group are sometimes considered as important as professional competence and experience. Moreover, establishing rapport and friendship remain key to conducting business and effective problem-solving.

Argentines generally converse in closer proximity. Adapt to this practice--it may be taken personally if you back away from someone.

One way of understanding the 'chain of command' is by observing the amount of deference given to others during a meeting. Watching how the participants treat each other can be very telling, especially in a society slightly status-conscious.

Business discussions should be preceded by some preliminary 'small talk.'

An initial visit should be made by an upper-level executive, accompanied by mid-level executives. Mid-level executives will attend subsequent visits to conduct negotiations that go into greater depth.

Your Argentine counterparts may appear formal during an initial meeting, but the warmth will increase in subsequent encounters.

Conservative values prevail in economics. A sense of humour is appreciated, although for the most part, meetings remain intensely focused and serious.

Character is very important to Argentine businesspeople; refrain from publicly criticizing or patronizing others, and doing anything else that might create embarrassment.

Displaying kindness and respect towards other people are valued qualities, and there is a tendency to avoid aggressive behaviour. It's important to be empathetic in your dealings. Moreover, you will find that expressing concern for the country's welfare and the Argentines you deal with is an appreciated gesture.

In negotiations, feelings sometimes take precedence over facts. Among Argentines, perceptions of the truth can be subjective and personal. Catholic values have had a profound influence on their thinking.

Using the 'hard-sell' and other aggressive tactics will not go over well. Instead, specify your priorities, terms, and conditions. Proposing a strong financial package, with options such as non-traditional financing terms is another asset. Providing continued service to your client, despite the long distances involved, can be a welcome gesture of commitment.

Argentine business culture is as bureaucratic as other Latin American countries; however, higher-level executives have a reputation for efficiency. Usually, those in the highest positions of authority are entrusted with the final decision, so it's important to remain patient. Moreover, it may be necessary to make several trips before the transaction concludes.

Generally, contract agreements are followed rigidly, problems are resolved swiftly, and payments are made promptly on the deadline.

Business entertaining is usually a social event and the best policy is to let your host initiate any discussion of business. Do whatever you can to help everyone feel at ease and have a good time. It's important that you make gestures like these to demonstrate to your Argentine companions that a relationship with them is a greater priority than business. People who focus solely on work-related matters will not make friends or succeed in business here.

Staying at one of the finer international hotels in any large Argentine city will help you create a good impression as a visitor.

Business entertaining usually takes place at major restaurants and hotels.

There are many types of restaurants in Argentina, depending on the city you are staying in. Making the payment arrangements in advance, so that your guests will not insist on footing the bill, is an efficient and tasteful way to host. If you are a guest, reciprocate the hospitality at a later date.

Breakfast is usually taken between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m. Customarily, there is a one-hour break for lunch--the biggest meal of the day--that can occur sometime between noon and 2:00 p.m.

Dinner is served between 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. If you are invited for drinks at a home, you will probably be invited to dinner as well.

At parties, greet and shake hands with each person individually. Refrain from using the North American conversation starter 'What do you do?' If people wish to discuss their occupation, they will eventually volunteer this information. Customarily, the host or the most senior man present will be seated at the head of the table, with the guest of honour at his immediate right. The next seat of honour will be to the immediate right of either the hostess or the second-highest ranking Argentine.

When your Argentine contact proposes a toast to you, propose another in return, and include a 'Salud!' or 'Cheers!'

Argentines emphasize good table manners and will observe how you measure up. The 'continental' style of dining is a must: the knife stays in the right hand and the fork remains positioned in the left. These utensils are never switched.

'Finger food' is not a part of formal meals, so it is necessary to use the utensils provided.

Always keep your hands visible when dining, with your wrists resting on the edge of the table. It is considered bad form to keep the hands concealed.

Take small bites and chew slowly. Chewing loudly, clanging silverware, scraping the plate, lip smacking, and finger licking are considered vulgar. Accept everything that you are served. If you come across something that you don't like, just take a sample bite or two for the sake of politeness. Wine should be poured with the right hand.

Before smoking, it's considered polite to offer cigarettes to your companions first.

After a dinner party or similar occasion, the best policy is to make a phone call expressing your thanks.

If a gratuity is not included in your bill, then a 10-15 % tip is in order.