

Indonesia: Cultural Tips

When writing the date in Indonesia, the day is listed first, followed by the month, then the year [i.e., November 15, 2008 would appear as 15/11/08].

Large corporations require you to schedule appointments more than a week in advance, while most other organizations are willing to make appointments on short notice.

Business hours are generally 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, with additional hours on Saturday mornings. Some businesses have a full workday on Fridays, although Muslim employees will take at least one hour off on Friday to pray. Saturday hours generally end by 1:00 p.m.

The traditional lunch period is from 12:00 p.m. or 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.; lunch is often the largest meal of the day.

Most government offices keep an 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. schedule, with a half-day on Friday or Saturday.

Although business transactions and correspondence are frequently conducted in English, attempts to use Bahasa Indonesia, the country's official language, are also appreciated. Moreover, all official correspondence with government officials must be in Bahasa Indonesia. Use of the language is also mandated for many advertisements and publications.

Although many government officials will speak some English, they may prefer to hold meetings in Bahasa Indonesia. Fortunately, English-speaking translators are usually easily accessible but may not be trustworthy in their translations.

Most businesspeople and most government officials are indigenous Indonesian, and their concept of time is very different from that of the Chinese Indonesians. Generally, Indonesians place less of an emphasis on efficiency, punctuality, and deadlines--hence the popular concept of 'rubber time' ['jam karet'] that exists in Indonesia. Consequently, it is important to remain patient and accommodating in all of your dealings with Indonesians.

The pace of business negotiations in Indonesia is slower than you may be accustomed to in the West. Since there is little sense of urgency about time, Indonesians dislike being hurried.

Whether or not an Indonesian will be punctual often depends on his or her status in the organization's hierarchy. For example, a subordinate must never be late for a meeting with a superior. Furthermore, it is the prerogative of the person of higher rank to make a person of lower standing wait. A high-ranking person will intentionally arrive at a meeting or similar function late once he or she knows that all of the lower-ranking participants are present.

Public or municipal meetings can begin late, often by one hour or more.

As a visitor to the country and a Westerner, you are expected to be on time for all business appointments. This is especially true if you are meeting someone who thinks that they are of a higher social standing than yourself. Sometimes, Indonesians can be as much as two hours late for meetings, so be sure to bring work, a book, or another diversion to fill the time should you be kept waiting.

When invited to a social event, Indonesians try to ascertain who will be the most important guests. They will then attempt to arrive later than 'minor' figures on the guest list, but earlier than more important ones. To ensure that no one arrives after the important guests, invitations sometimes add the request 'Please arrive 15 minutes early.'

Store hours vary. Most stores will be open five or six days a week, and will open at 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. and close at 6:00 or 7:00 p.m.

Observant Muslims fast from dawn to sundown during the month of Ramadan, and this practice may affect your schedule when doing business in this country. Also, refrain from eating or drinking in front of fasting Indonesians

Indonesia is hot and humid throughout the year. During the day, most of the lowlands have a temperature of 75 to 95 F, and humidity around 75%. Cool temperatures occur only in the mountainous regions, where business travellers do not normally visit.

Because of the intense humidity, clothes made of natural fibres such as cotton and linen are often the best choices.

The rainy season is from November through May, but sudden showers occur all year long. Consequently, many people carry an umbrella every day, which, when it is not raining, is used for protection from the sun.

Indonesia is a predominantly Muslim culture, so conservative dress is key in many situations. Err on the formal side until you know to dress otherwise. Nevertheless, you may be surprised how informal dress can sometimes be at work and in social situations.

The safest option for a visiting businessman in Jakarta is to wear a suit jacket and tie, and remove them if it seems appropriate. A suit and tie are essential, however, during formal meetings with high-ranking government officials. A tie is not appropriate in some operations outside of the urban areas such as the oil/gas/mining sectors.

Because of the extreme heat and humidity, business dress in Indonesia is often casual. Standard formal office wear for men includes dark trousers and a light-colour long-sleeved shirt and tie, without a jacket. Many businessmen wear a short-sleeved shirt without a tie.

If an invitation specifies 'lounge suit', this actually only applies to Indonesian men. Western men should wear a standard Western business suit.

Many Indonesian men wear an open-necked, long-sleeved batik shirt to the office; these garments are also for formal social situations such as marriages or ceremonies. Western businessmen are encouraged to wear batik to formal social situations, although a shirt and tie are also acceptable.

Women must be sensitive to Muslim beliefs, and, consequently, wear blouses that cover at least their upper arms. Skirts should be knee length or longer.

For women, standard business attire includes dresses or blouse and skirt combinations with sleeves and hems that are conservative in length. Business suits and hosiery are reserved for more formal offices, while pants and pantsuits are best avoided. Bright and vivid hues in traditional patterns are generally considered appropriate for the workplace.

Respectability, even in casual dress, is preferred. Generally, shorts should only be worn in the urban areas and tourist destinations.

Jeans are acceptable casual wear especially by the younger Indonesian generation.

Regardless of what you choose to wear, make the effort to maintain a clean, well-groomed appearance. Also, Indonesians bathe several times a day.

Two of the great social changes that have occurred since the Asian economic crisis and the fall of President Suharto are freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Indonesians are quite open in expressing their opinions about many controversial topics. You as a guest, however, should avoid controversial topics or criticisms. Acceptable topics include: the weather, family, travel/tourism, sports, food/praising the local cuisine, future plans of the group or organization, the success of the group or organization, anecdotes about your attempts to learn Bahasa Indonesia and current events in general

Topics to Avoid

Indonesia's human rights record

Bureaucracy

Corruption

Military influence

Criticism of Indonesian ways

Commenting on Indonesian customs that you find peculiar

Religion

Personal success

In Indonesia, names are considered sacred and must be treated with respect. Make every effort not to mispronounce the names of the Indonesians you encounter.

Westerners often have difficulties understanding and pronouncing Indonesian names, so always take your time over an introduction. Repeat the title and name of the person and ask if you are pronouncing them correctly. If possible, write the name down phonetically.

No matter how difficult or unusual sounding a name, do not laugh at it.

Every variation of personal naming patterns can be found among Indonesia's ethnic groups. People may have one name or two, short names or long, a given name followed by a family name or vice versa, or one name and one initial.

With so many complexities, it is best to ask an Indonesian what you should call him or her. Repeat the sequence of names and make sure you have them correct. Specify what they should call you [they may be unsure as to which is your surname], but choose the same degree of formality.

As a general rule, among ethnic Indonesians, the average citizen will have only one name while the middle class will tend to have two. Typically, the higher a person's social standing, the longer his or her name. Long names, however, are often shortened for everyday use. A person with two names often uses one name plus the initial of the other name.

Businesspeople you meet must be addressed with at least a title and perhaps their name. If a person does not have a professional title [such as 'Doctor' or 'Vice-President'], a Westerner should use 'Bapak' for 'Mr.' or 'Ibu' for 'Madam', 'Mrs.' or 'Miss.'

Note that 'Bapak' literally means 'father' and 'Ibu' is mother.

In a formal introduction, the preferred sequence is:

1. 'Bapak' or 'Ibu'
2. academic title, if any [alternatively, an academic title may be stated at the end of this list]
3. honorific, if any
4. the individual's given and family name
5. business or political title

Indonesia was a colony of the Netherlands, and usually uses Dutch academic titles. These include:

Drs: 'Doktorandus', a graduate in any discipline except engineering or law [male]

Dra: 'Doktoranda', the same degree as above, when awarded to a woman

Ir: 'Insinjur', a graduate with an engineering degree [male or female]

S H: 'Sarjana Hukum', a graduate with a law degree [male or female]

Westerners should use their usual academic titles, rather than translate them into the Indonesian equivalent.

Some Indonesians adopt an English first name to make it easier for North Americans and other Westerners to address them.

A Muslim male who has made his pilgrimage to Mecca is addressed as 'Haji.' A woman who has done so would be addressed as 'Hajjah.' These titles are not automatically given to spouses; they have to be individually earned by making the pilgrimage. When unsure, however, it's usually appreciated if you give the person the benefit of the doubt.

During the first meeting, presenting your Indonesian counterparts with small gifts is one of the best ways to display your interest and sincerity in establishing a long-term business relationship. On this occasion, the gifts should be modest but thoughtful, such as tokens representative of your country or that feature your company logo.

You are also expected to give gifts to celebrate an occasion, when you return from a trip, when you are invited to an Indonesian home, when a visitor comes to tour your office or workplace, and to thank someone for providing you with a service.

Gifts of food are always appreciated by Indonesians, but avoid bringing food gifts with you to a dinner party [unless it has been agreed upon beforehand]. To bring food may imply that your host cannot provide enough. Instead, send food as a thank-you gift afterwards. Candy or fruit baskets are good choices.

Unwrapping a gift in front of the giver is not a part of Indonesian culture. This action implies that the recipient is greedy and impatient. Moreover, if the gift turns out to be a poor choice, 'loss of face' will result. Instead, the recipient will briefly say 'thank-you', set aside the gift, and then open it only after your departure. You will also be expected to follow this ritual when you receive a gift.

Western advertising has popularised flowers as gifts.

Remember that personal gifts from a man to a woman can be misinterpreted as having a romantic intent. Consequently, Indonesian business protocol requires that a businessman say that his wife sent the gift.

At Chinese New Year, it is customary to present a gift of money in a red envelope to children and nongovernmental service personnel you deal with on a regular basis. The gift is called a 'hong bao.' Ensure that you give only new bills in even numbers and even amounts. Many employers give each employee a 'hong bao' equivalent to one month's salary. All Indonesians receive one month's salary at the end of the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan. This is a national labour law.

Appreciated Gifts

With the exception of dinner parties, food can be a welcome gift. Moreover, when visiting an area of Indonesia where a delicacy is available, it's expected that you bring samples back for your friends. When selecting a gift of food for an observant Muslim, however, meat products must be 'halal', which is the Muslim designation of permitted foods.

In Indonesia, songbirds are prized pets. In fact, tapes and CDs of the music of champion songbirds are popular here, and make good gifts for those with affection for birds.

Avoid bringing gifts of food with you to a dinner party unless it has been agreed upon beforehand. To bring food may imply that the hospitality is inadequate--a terrible insult to an Indonesian host. Your safest option is to send food as a thank-you gift afterwards. Candy or fruit baskets are good choices.

Gifts to Avoid Giving to an Observant Muslim

Alcohol

Perfumes containing alcohol

Pork

Pigskin products

Personal items such as underwear

Knives

Toy dogs or gifts that picture dogs

Images of nude or partially clad women [even in paintings or sculptures with artistic merit]

Gifts to Avoid Giving to an Observant Hindu

Be sensitive that observant Hindus do not eat beef or use cattle products. Consequently, leather items of any kind should not be considered as gifts.

Taking the time to develop solid, long-term personal relationships is of vital importance when doing business here. In Indonesian business culture, relationships are based on respect and trust. Consequently, you will have to take time to establish good will, and this often involves making several trips over a period of months.

Indonesians tend to be very friendly and you should reciprocate this immediate friendliness. They are more likely to buy from people who treat them with deference and seem to genuinely like them.

Your presentation material and company literature should be translated into Bahasa Indonesia, the country's official language. You may also want to make your presentation in a bi-lingual format. However, all official correspondence with government officials must be in Bahasa Indonesia. Use of the language is also mandated for many advertisements and publications.

Although many government officials may speak some English, they will probably prefer to hold meetings in Bahasa Indonesia. Fortunately, English-speaking translators are usually accessible.

Indonesian business culture is extremely hierarchical. If you are part of a negotiating team or other type of delegation, line up so that the most important individuals will be introduced first. Also, if you are introducing two people, state the name of the most important person first.

It's an asset to have your business card printed in colour and embossed, since Indonesian businesspeople tend to appreciate ornate cards. Most importantly, however, ensure that your card emphasizes your name and position.

Your business card should contain as much information as possible, including your business title and qualifications. Indonesians include all of this data on their card, as well as any titles of nobility.

Business cards should be exchanged immediately, after an initial handshake and greeting. Also, ensure that the card is offered with your right hand, facing the recipient.

When you receive another person's card, make a show of carefully examining it for a few moments and then remarking upon it before putting it in your card case or on a nearby table. Be aware that accepting a business card and then immediately stuffing it into your back pocket will be perceived as disrespectful.

Meetings tend to be very formal: the Indonesian participants will enter the room based on their hierarchical position and then take a seat. You will be expected to remain standing until this ritual concludes.

Politeness is a necessary part of a successful business relationship in Indonesia. Politeness will not, however, affect the determination of Indonesian businesspeople to reach their objectives.

The meeting will usually begin with a bit of preliminary 'small talk', or a subsequent meeting with a period of 'catching up.' You should focus on business whenever the most important Indonesian brings up the subject.

The pace of business negotiations in Indonesia is slower than you may be accustomed to in the United States. There is also less of an emphasis on efficiency, punctuality, and deadlines--hence the popular concept of 'rubber time' that exists in Indonesia. Consequently, it is important to remain patient and accommodating in all of your dealings.

Punctuality is not closely observed. For example, public or municipal meetings can begin late, often by one hour or more. Since there is little sense of urgency about time, Indonesians dislike being hurried.

The group, rather than the individual, prevails in Indonesian business culture. The individual identity is subsumed into the group. Moreover, Indonesians generally live in concentrations, are used to being crowded, and need relatively little personal space.

The oldest or most competent member usually assumes the leadership position in the group. Superiors are often from chosen families or emanate from the higher ranks in the army. Age, seniority or military rank accords status.

Superiors are expected to be paternalistic, yet they typically seek the consensus of the group.

Whether it is for undue praise or criticism, individuals are uncomfortable being singled out in public.

Since individuals are expected to be a part of a group, it is the group that is addressed. If you have to criticize an employee, do it privately and in a calm, serious manner.

Superiors are treated with tremendous deference and any flaws in their behaviour are overlooked. For example, if a superior arrives late, it is disrespectful to show any signs of annoyance. Furthermore, superiors are told what they want to hear--at least in the presence the group. Candid comments or criticism have to be conveyed in private, often by a close friend of the superior. Protecting a superior from hearing bad news in public is one way of conferring honour upon that person.

It can be very difficult for a foreign manager to get accurate reports from Indonesian employees, since the employees are likely to say whatever they think will please their boss. This practice is popularly known as 'asal bapak senang' ['keeping father happy']. Foreign managers must establish a network through which they can be told the truth in private. For example, Indonesians who have worked or been educated in the West can be valuable contacts for this purpose, since they are more likely to be sympathetic to a manager's desire to know the truth.

'Saving face' is an important concept to understand since, in Indonesian business culture, a person's reputation and social standing rest on this concept. Keep your cool and refrain from showing that you are upset. By remaining calm at all times, you will be perceived as being able to control your emotions, rather than allowing them to control you. Causing embarrassment or loss of composure, even unintentionally, can seriously harm business negotiations.

You must do everything you can to prevent the occurrence of 'losing face', that is, losing control of your emotions or otherwise causing embarrassment. One example of 'losing face' is expressing anger in public; anyone who makes such displays is judged as unworthy of respect and trust. In Indonesia, 'losing face' is known as 'malu.'

It's essential that you speak in quiet, gentle tones and always remain calm and in control of your emotions.

Speaking is best conducted in a quiet voice and without displaying too much emotion. Confrontation is avoided and problems or areas of difference are alluded to in an indirect manner. Again, Indonesians have a tendency to tell foreigners what they think will please them or what they wish to hear.

You may find that the Indonesian participants will say very little during a meeting. This reticence, however, should not be interpreted negatively. Often, participants will remain aloof until they convene with their group to gather consensus. Also, Indonesians tend to be soft-spoken, and you should make the effort to do the same.

During a meeting or presentation, you will have to take the initiative to discern if your audience understands you. Since 'saving face' is so important in this culture, people will not admit in front of others that they are having difficulties. Also, the general level of English is quite low.

Indonesians may allow a person to proceed incorrectly rather than correct him or her and cause embarrassment for that person. In effect, an Indonesian can 'honour' someone's authority while allowing him or her to make an error that could prove to be disastrous.

Indonesians tend to be shrewd negotiators, intent on obtaining the best deal possible. You will earn their respect if you maintain a positive, persistent attitude.

It is normal to 'haggle' over a business deal. Indonesians routinely bargain for most purchases and exchanges in their daily lives, and can be very astute negotiators. So, be aware that even people who seem very reserved should not be underestimated as businesspeople.

Deferential listening and quiet speaking are aimed at maintaining harmony. Nevertheless, hard bargainers are respected. There are, in reality, no fixed prices and starting positions may appear far too unreasonable.

Before answering a question, Indonesian business protocol demands that the respondent make a respectful pause--lasting as long as 10 to 15 seconds. Westerners will sometimes mistakenly assume that they have an agreement and resume talking before an Indonesian has a chance to give a genuine response.

You may be asked extremely personal questions regarding your salary, education, family life or, conversely, why you are unmarried and childless. If you don't want to answer, remain polite but try to gracefully side step the question. In most cases, people ask these questions to determine your status--which means everything in Indonesian business culture.

To successfully hold a conversation, it's essential for Indonesians to know if they are speaking with a person who is their superior, inferior or equal. Generally, they will feel uncomfortable until they learn your status--hence the tendency to ask very personal questions.

As a face-saving measure, Indonesians will often say 'yes' when they don't actually mean it. For example, a 'yes' may be used to disguise a lukewarm response such as 'I'll think about it' or an outright 'no.' You will have to be alert to subtleties in conversation to help discern the sincerity of the response.

Sucking in air through your teeth is one way to signal a definite answer of 'no.' In Indonesian business culture, this sound is used to indicate that there is a serious problem, even if on the surface, what is being said sounds positive.

If you can tell that the respondent is deliberately ignoring your question, this is often another way of indicating a 'no' answer.

There is often reluctance among Indonesians to admit that they don't know the answer to a question. In fact, they will sometimes give the wrong directions as a face-saving measure!

Don't assume that a smile is an indication of amusement or approval. Frequently, smiling is used to mask embarrassment, shyness, nervousness, disapproval, and other feelings of distress. This is why you will sometimes observe Indonesians smiling or laughing during inappropriately sombre or tense moments.

Female business travellers are likely to find acceptance, since a significant proportion of Indonesian women already work as professionals. Still, visiting businesswomen are advised to act and dress conservatively and professionally at all times.

In Indonesian business culture, displays of overly aggressive, domineering behaviour in women will not be well received. Although women in business are expected to be just as competent as men, they must calmly assert their influence and authority in a firm, restrained manner.

In Indonesia, the position of women is quite different from other Muslim countries: they can vote, have full civil rights, and on many islands, hold leadership positions. Moreover, Indonesian women have never been veiled or secluded.

Women should also be sure to include spouses when extending any invitations for social functions to Indonesian businessmen.

Bribery is common at most levels of society and is known as 'facilitating payments.'

Indonesian business is hierarchical and decision-making lies with senior management. Be sure you are meeting with higher-ranking individuals, especially in the deal's final stages.

A deal is never complete until all the paperwork is signed. Since Indonesians [especially the Chinese] often consult astrologers, the signing may be delayed until a 'lucky' day arrives.

In Indonesia, the decision-making process is slow and deliberate. If you attempt to rush or put pressure of any kind on the decision, you will only risk alienating your Indonesian counterparts. A very low-keyed and thoughtful approach to business will help you maintain harmony with the Indonesian side.

Accept social invitations of any kind; these occasions are an important part of doing business here. If you must decline, give a plausible excuse so that you do not cause the invitee to 'lose face' and so that you remain on the preferred guest list in the future.

In the early stages of your visit, you may not receive many social invitations. Nevertheless, remain patient and allow your Indonesian counterparts to initiate these necessary first invitations. It's also useful to remember that there is a prevailing belief that you cannot properly host a gathering until you have been a guest at an Indonesian event.

Many Indonesians have negative images of business travellers and tourists. Social encounters, however, are the best opportunities for you to dispel any preconceived ideas.

Respond, in writing, to any invitations you receive.

The person who extends the invitation is responsible for paying the bill. If you receive invitations during your stay, be sure to reciprocate before returning home.

There is a prevailing belief in Indonesia that the office is the only place to discuss business. Therefore, refrain from discussing business in a social situation, unless your Indonesian companions bring up the subject.

The guest of honour is usually seated next to the host [if the honouree is a male] or hostess [if the honouree is a female].

You should demonstrate respect for the guest of honour by waiting until he or she has ordered before you do so. Additionally, wait until he has served himself and has taken the first sip of his beverage before you proceed with the meal. This is very important. If you are the host, be sure that you invite your guest to begin.

Forks and spoons are the main utensils; knives are rarely, if ever, a part of the Indonesian dining experience.

Eat and pass dishes with the right hand only, since the left hand is considered unclean. This rule applies even if you are left-handed. The left hand may be used only when there is no other realistic alternative.

You will be presented with a wide array of food originating from Indonesia's numerous regions. Make an effort to sample everything, if for no other reason than as a sign of respect to Indonesian culture.

Seasonings--many of which are hot and spicy--are an essential part of Indonesian cooking. Consequently, ensure that you have plenty of water on hand. Indonesians think that most westerners cannot tolerate spicy food. They will ask if it is too hot and then laugh at your response.

Rice will be served at every meal, often combined with a variety of meats and vegetables. Indonesians often believe that Westerners cannot eat rice and will be surprised when you do.

Some Indonesian foods unfamiliar to many Westerners include shrimp that is served and eaten with the legs still attached, fish-head soup, and meats such as goat and buffalo.

Always leave a portion of your meal on your plate to signal that you've been satisfied with the meal.

When you have finished your meal, place your fork with the tines down on your plate and cross the spoon over it.

In most of Indonesia's better restaurants, a 10% gratuity charge is added. Whenever you are in doubt if this charge has been added to the bill, it is okay to ask. If it hasn't been included, leave a 10% tip. In traditional restaurants tipping is not practiced.

When bellboys and doormen have been of assistance to you, it is in order to tip them approximately Rp 5,000. When you are assisted with your luggage, you should give Rp 1,000 - 2,000 per bag to the porter.

Home invitations are rare because of cramped housing, often inhabited by several extended family members. If you are invited to an Indonesian home, you should consider it a rare honour, but might want to suggest that you meet in a more neutral social situation such as a restaurant.

If invited to a home, you are expected to arrive 10 to 20 minutes late. Upon arrival, discreetly check to see if your host or hostess is wearing shoes. If not, be sure to remove your own shoes.

It is appropriate to bring a gift with you. While any small token gift will be appreciated, such as candy or something representative of your country, avoid giving alcohol if your hosts are Muslim.

Wait for the host to invite you to begin eating or drinking.

Most Indonesians go to bed relatively early, and guests typically leave between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m. or directly after the meal or any speeches are finished.

In your business dealings, be sure to become familiar with the most senior person. If you are hosting a dinner, this individual should be considered the guest of honour and treated with special attention.

Women should be sure to include spouses when extending any invitations for social functions to Indonesian businessmen.

Planning a dinner party or similar social event in Indonesia can be extremely complicated, as outlined in the following points:

First, ensure that you send written invitations, addressed to the husband and wife, at least two weeks in advance. Be aware that even if your invitations state 'RSVP', you may not receive many responses. Consequently, you should phone your guests to confirm if they will be attending your gathering. Be prepared to state the reason for the party and reveal the entire guest list, including the guest of honour.

When invited to a social event, Indonesians try to ascertain who will be the most important guests. They will then attempt to arrive later than 'minor' figures on the guest list, but earlier than more important ones. To ensure that no one arrives after the important guests, invitations sometimes add the request: 'Please arrive 15 minutes early.'

Do not send invitations printed on white, black or blue paper to Indonesian Chinese, as these colours are associated with sadness. Red or pink, however, can be acceptable colours for invitations.

Generally, spouses may be invited to dinner but not to lunch. Be aware, however, that business will not be discussed in the presence of spouses.

Make the effort to invite several Indonesians of the same ethnic group. Also, be sensitive to the fact that many of the wives in attendance may not speak English well.

Hold your party early, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. In Indonesia, people usually rise and go to bed early. The guests will probably be gone by 9:30 p.m.

Indonesians find buffets more comfortable than sit-down dinners with assigned places. Nevertheless, ensure that the food served in the buffet is sophisticated.

Remember that observant Muslims do not drink alcohol or consume pork products.

Show tremendous respect toward your guest of honour. He or she is the last to arrive and the first to go through the buffet line. Also, accompany your special guest to the buffet table, explaining what each dish is. Guests will begin to excuse themselves around 9:00 p.m., and you should escort the honoree to his or her car.

Generally, greetings among all Indonesians are conducted with stateliness and formality, in a slow, deliberate manner. A hurried introduction can be perceived as disrespectful.

Handshakes are the standard greeting. Actually, most Indonesian handshakes bear a greater similarity to handclasps, since they are quite limp and last between 10-12 seconds. You can bow your head, lower your eyes, and smile. It is often inappropriate to touch a woman wearing the Islamic headdress. When introduced, allow the woman to initiate the handshake and be sure to keep any handshake limp.

The traditional Hindu greeting involves a slight bow with the palms of the hands together, as if praying. Older, traditional Hindus often use this greeting, called the 'namaste.' It is also an acceptable alternative to a handshake when a Western businesswoman greets a Hindu man. However, this is only prevalent on the Island of Bali.

With the exception of handshakes, there is no public contact between the sexes in Indonesia. Hugging and kissing, even between husbands and wives, are frowned upon in public.

Conversely, physical contact between people of the same sex is perfectly acceptable. You'll likely observe men holding hands with men or even walking with their arms around each other; these displays are viewed mostly as gestures of friendship.

When someone asks you 'Where are you going?' you can answer 'down the street' or 'for a walk.' In Indonesian culture, this question is similar to 'How are you?', so a detailed account of your daily plans is not expected. A local idiomatic response to this question is 'I'm eating the wind.'

Be aware that many Indonesians believe that the head is the 'seat of the soul.' Consequently, never touch an adult's head.

Traditionally, the head should not be held higher than that of a superior or older family member. For example, Indonesians often go so far as to lower their heads or drop their shoulders when passing 'superiors' on the street. This does not apply to business situations.

Among both Muslims and Hindus, the left hand is considered unclean, and whenever possible, should not be used in giving or receiving. The right hand should be used exclusively to eat, accept gifts, hold cash, and touch people; these guidelines apply even if you are left-handed. You may, however, use your left hand to handle objects by yourself.

Since the bottom of the shoe is also considered unclean, do not use it to point at, move or touch things. Also, refrain from resting your shoes on desks or tables. Be aware that following this rule affects how you will be able to sit: you can cross your legs at the knee, but not with one ankle over your knee.

The 'arms akimbo' position, that is, standing tall with your hands on your hips, is perceived as an angry, aggressive posture. Indeed, this pose is popularly identified as a symbol of anger in Indonesian shadow puppet theatre.

To beckon someone, hold your hand out, palm downward, and make a scooping motion with the fingers. Beckoning someone with the palm up and wagging one finger, however, will often be interpreted as obscene.

When pointing, do so with an open hand, rather than with your index finger. You can also point with your right thumb and a closed fist [similar to the hitchhiking signal]; this gesture is also used to indicate "You go first."

Pounding one fist into the palm of your other hand is another gesture to be avoided, as Indonesians sometimes perceive it as obscene.

Chewing gum or eating while walking in public is discouraged.