

Malaysia: Cultural Tips

All correspondence with government officials must be in the language of Bahasa Malaysia. If you wish, provide an accompanying translation in English.

Although most Malays are Muslim, not all of Malaysia follows the traditional Islamic working week in which Friday is the Islamic holy day and the weekend takes place on Thursday and Friday.

Only five Malaysian states follow the Islamic workweek of Saturday through Wednesday. These include Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johore.

The Malaysian capital city, Kuala Lumpur, is in the state of Selangor, where the working week is Monday through Friday.

Standard business hours are 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday; offices are sometimes open half a day on Saturday, usually in the morning.

In the more observant Muslim states [Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan, Terengganu, and Johore] the working week is Saturday through Wednesday. Offices in these states are sometimes open for half a day on Thursday, usually in the morning.

Since most of the country is Muslim, it would be sensible to schedule meetings around prayer times. For example, Friday at noon is a particularly busy time for prayers. Moreover, many companies close their offices on Friday afternoons.

Traditionally, the lunch period was from noon or 12:15 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., but this largely has been reduced to one hour, beginning at 12:00 p.m. or 1:00 p.m. Nevertheless, many people still take longer than an hour for lunch. In states where Friday is a workday, Muslims will take a two-hour break to attend a mosque.

Try to schedule appointments at least two weeks in advance. If you have not yet arrived in Malaysia, it's a good policy to schedule them a month ahead of time. Malaysian executives tend travel frequently, mainly to conferences in their area of professional interest.

Government office hours are typically 8:30 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Also, government offices are open on Saturdays from 8:30 a.m. until 12:00 p.m.; in the more observant Muslim states, they are open Thursday from 8:30 a.m. to noon.

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

Holidays in Malaysia vary from state to state. The observant Muslim states do not celebrate any non-Islamic holidays such as Christmas and Easter.

The majority of Malaysian businesspeople are Chinese; you can expect them to be punctual. Most government officials, however, are ethnic Malays who have more of a relaxed attitude toward time. Although business travellers are expected to be on time, an ethnic Malay may not necessarily do the same.

The Indian minority's perspective on time is similar to that of the Malays. Nevertheless, the Indian professionals you may encounter will expect punctuality.

Although punctuality is not always a priority in Malaysia, you should still arrive on time for appointments. Even if you know you are going to be kept waiting, make an effort to arrive on time. Moreover, making a Malaysian executive wait can result in "loss of face," which has negative consequences in this culture.

Social events in Malaysia involving different cultural groups have varying rules. In general, when invited to a social event, most Malaysians arrive on time or slightly late. In any case, don't arrive more than half an hour late.

Alcohol will not be served at any social event hosted by observant Muslims. Since there won't be a "cocktail hour" on these occasions, expect that the meal will be served close to the time given on the invitation.

Guests may arrive a few minutes early to a social occasion only when a close friendship has been established. If you are hosting a social event and your guests are close friends, make the effort to be ready early.

Malaysia is incredibly hot and humid throughout the year. The temperature ranges from 75-95 F and humidity between 60 and 70%

The monsoon season runs from September through December, but sudden showers occur all year long. Many people carry an umbrella every day.

Because Malaysia is very hot all year long, cotton and linen clothes are the most sensible choices. Regardless, be sure to pack lightweight fabrics.

Avoid wearing yellow because it is the colour reserved for Malaysian royalty.

As a foreigner, you should dress more conservatively until you are sure certain of the degree of formality expected.

Because of the heat and humidity, business dress in Malaysia is often casual. Standard formal office wear for men is dark trousers and a light-coloured long-sleeved shirt and tie, without a jacket. Many businessmen wear a short-sleeved shirt with no tie. The safest option for a male business traveller is to wear a suit jacket and tie, and remove them if it seems appropriate.

Standard business attire for women includes dresses and light-coloured, long-sleeved blouses and skirts. Stockings and business suits are reserved for very formal offices. Pantsuits or slacks may be inappropriate in some Malaysian offices.

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

In Malaysia, clothing styles for businesswomen tend to be frilly and ornamental.

Many Malaysian men wear an open-necked batik shirt to the office; these garments are also popular for casual wear.

Jeans are acceptable casual wear.

Shorts should be avoided.

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

Be aware that in Malaysia, it's perfectly acceptable to ask people questions about their weight, income, marital status, and related subjects. Moreover, you may even be subjected to these questions!

If you don't wish to answer personal inquiries, side-step these questions as graciously as possible. Regardless, do not express annoyance, outrage, or similar feelings that will cause the questioner to "lose face."

Welcome Topics of Conversation

Your Malaysian host's family and heritage

Business

Sports, especially soccer

Art

Travel

Plans for the future

Success of the group or organization

Praising the local cuisine

Topics to Avoid

Criticizing any aspect of Malaysian culture

Comparing life in Malaysia to life in the West

Politics

Bureaucracy

Ethnic relations in Malaysia and in general

Religion

Sex/roles of the sexes

Addressing Malaysians properly can be difficult, especially for Westerners unfamiliar with the naming patterns of the country's various ethnic groups. During an introduction, make a point of repeating the title and name of the person; afterwards, ask if you are pronouncing everything correctly.

When you ask a Malaysian what you should call him or her, directly state what he or she should call you. Your Malaysian counterpart may be unsure as to which of your names is your surname. Follow the Malaysian's lead as to the degree of formality.

Most businesspeople you meet should be addressed with a title and name. If a person does not have a professional title [i.e., "Professor", "Doctor", "Engineer"], a Westerner may use courtesy titles such as "Mr." or "Mrs.", plus the name. Be aware, however, that you may be omitting other titles that are important to both the person and to your understanding of that person.

Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy with nine royal houses. With so many royals, foreigners are likely to encounter one eventually. Titles and forms of address vary. The best strategy is to ask a native how a particular royal should be addressed.

Ethnic Malay Naming Patterns

“Mr.”= **Encik**

“Mrs.” = **Puan**

“Miss” = **Cik**

Each Muslim male is known by a given name followed by “bin” [son of] plus his father's name.

A Malay woman is identified by her given name plus “binti” [daughter of], followed by her father's name. For business purposes, some Malay women attach their husband's name. Note that in English, “binti” may also be spelled “binte.”

Some Westernised Malays drop the “bin” or “binti” from their name.

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.

Chinese Naming Patterns

Chinese names appear in a different order than Western names. Each person has, in this order, a family, generational, and first name. Generational and given names can be separated by a space or a hyphen, but are frequently written as one word.

A Chinese wife will usually retain her maiden name; she will not use her husband's name at all.

Most people should be addressed with a title and their name. If a person does not have a professional title, use “Mr.,” “Madam” or “Miss”, plus the last name.

Many Malaysian Chinese and Indians adopt an English first name to make it easier for North Americans and other Westerners to address them.

Indian Naming Patterns

Traditionally, Hindus do not have family surnames. Instead, a Hindu male would use the initial of his father's name first, followed by his personal name.

Indian female names follow the same pattern, with the father's initial plus personal name. When an Indian woman marries, she usually ceases to use her father's initial. Instead, her husband's name is followed by her personal name.

Indian Sikhs have a given name followed by either “Singh” [for men] or “Kaur” [for women]. Consequently, always address Indian Sikhs by a title and first name--it's not sufficient to address a Sikh male as “Mr. Singh.”

Many Malaysian Chinese and Indians adopt an English first name to make it easier for North Americans and other Westerners to address them.

Gifts are usually reserved for friends. Before giving a gift of any kind, you must first establish a personal relationship with the recipient. Otherwise, the gift may very well be perceived as a bribe.

The Malaysian Anti-Corruption Agency has exceptionally strict laws against bribery. Moreover, giving a gift that seems too generous may be interpreted as a bribe and could get you in trouble with the authorities.

It's a good idea to select a modest, inexpensive gift so that the recipient won't feel obligated to you. Also, when receiving a gift, take care not to reciprocate with one of greater value compared to the present you received.

Gifts are not opened in front of the giver. Opening presents alone allows both the giver and recipient to "save face." There is a cultural belief that the giver and recipient may be embarrassed if the gift turns out to be a poor choice.

A gift should be received in both hands, palms facing upwards.

You will be relieved that you arrived with gifts in hand when you are given a present unexpectedly.

Recommended business gifts include quality pens, desk accessories, and items representative of your country or city.

Recommended social gifts include something representative of your country or a food that may be considered a delicacy.

If you are a man and feel that it is necessary to give a gift to a female colleague, be aware that in this culture, personal gifts from a man to a woman can be misinterpreted as having a romantic intent. Malaysian business protocol requires that a man should explain that his wife sent the perfume, scarf, or similar gift item.

Do not wrap your gift with white paper because this colour is associated with death and mourning. Blue, black, and yellow gift-wrap should also be avoided.

If invited to an ethnic Malay home, try to bring small, practical gifts for the family. Present the gifts shortly before departing, not when arriving.

Good choices include alcohol-free perfumes or colognes for a hostess, toys for children, and collared, fine cotton shirts for men.

Foods can make good gifts, although meat products of any kind must be "halal", which is the Muslim equivalent of kosher. The prohibition against pork and alcohol also cancels out pigskin products and perfumes containing alcohol.

Present gifts with the right hand only.

Don't wrap gifts for ethnic Malays in white paper; white is associated with funerals.

Green or red wrapping paper is the safest choice.

Gifts to Avoid Giving to Observant Muslims

Alcohol

Pork

Personal items such as underwear

Toy dogs or gifts that picture dogs

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

General Guidelines for Giving Gifts to the Chinese in Malaysia

It is Chinese custom to decline a gift three times before accepting; this ritual prevents the recipient from appearing too acquisitive. In the face of these protestations, continue to insist. Once your gift is finally accepted say that you are pleased that the recipient has done so. When you receive a gift, you will be expected to go through the same routine.

Give an even number of flowers to a Chinese person. An odd number of flowers will only be perceived as an omen of bad luck.

Gifts of food are acceptable, but not at dinner parties or other occasions where appetizers and meals will be served. Candy and fruit baskets, however, are appreciated as thank-you gifts sent after these events.

At Chinese New Year, it is customary to give a gift of money in a red envelope to children and to the service personnel you deal with on a regular basis. This gift is called "hong bao." Give only new bills in even numbers and even amounts. Many employers give each employee a "hong bao" equivalent to one month's salary. This is a government-mandated type of gift-giving that may be applicable to you if you are considered an employer in the country.

Red or pink wrapping paper is the safest choice.

Gifts to Avoid

Gifts or wrappings where the predominant colour is white, black or blue

Knives, scissors or cutting tools--they suggest the severing of a friendship or similar close bond.

Items Associated with Funerals [Avoid!]

Clocks

Towels

Handkerchiefs

Straw sandals

Guidelines for Giving Gifts to Indians in Malaysia

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

When presenting gifts of money, odd numbers are preferred since they are believed to be luckier.

Those of Indian descent will appreciate receiving gifts in odd numbers, such as one, 11, 21, and so on, because these amounts are considered lucky. But avoid giving gifts in multiples of three, because this number is considered bad luck.

The frangipani [a flower popularly used by Hawaiians to make leis] is used by Indians only for funeral wreaths.

Business cards should be printed--preferably embossed--in English. Since a high proportion of Malaysian businesspeople are Chinese, it will be an asset to have the reverse side of your card translated into Chinese. Moreover, gold ink is the most prestigious colour for Chinese characters.

Ensure that your business card outlines your education, professional qualifications, and business title. You'll find that Malaysians include many of these details on their card.

After the necessary introductions are made, offer your card to everyone present.

Present your card with both hands. Another option is to present your card using your right hand, with the left hand gently supporting your right.

Give your card to the recipient with the print facing him or her.

The recipient will accept your card with both hands, then carefully examine it for a few moments before putting it away in a card case or pocket. When a card is presented to you, you will also be expected to go through this procedure.

After receiving a card, never hastily stuff it into your back pocket. Moreover, do not write on another person's business card.

Western women are likely to encounter few problems conducting business in Malaysia.

Malaysian business culture is composed largely of Chinese and Indians, whose perspectives and customs are significantly different from those of ethnic Malays.

Malaysians, regardless of ethnicity, do business only with people they know and like.

You will have to be prepared to make several trips to Malaysia before the decision-making stage. Just as in other cultures, establishing a productive business relationship requires a long-term commitment.

Expect negotiations to be slow and protracted.

The pace of negotiations in Malaysia is far slower than you may be accustomed to in North America.

Getting acquainted is the main purpose of the first meeting.

It is important for foreign business executives to develop a personal relationship with their Malaysian counterparts.

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

Always treat the elderly with respect. Make a point of acknowledging them first in a group. Moreover, do not smoke or wear sunglasses in their presence.

Before your presentation, ensure that you have carefully thought through all aspects of your proposal.

In Malaysian business culture, transactions and correspondence are frequently conducted in English. Be aware, however, that the English spoken often has unique pronunciations, syntax, and grammar, which can easily lead to misunderstandings.

Bahasa Malaysia is the official language of Malaysia. Although most government officials speak some English, they may prefer to hold meetings in their own language. An English-speaking translator, however, is usually provided for these occasions.

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Ethnic Malays will accept “outside” concepts only if they are in accordance with the Islamic religion.

Ethnic Malays tend to be subjective, associative thinkers. They will often involve themselves personally in problem solving, rather than seek guidance from a specific set of laws or rules.

When formulating arguments and making decisions, empirical evidence and other facts will be considered only by the most secularised, Westernised Malays.

Subjective feelings, combined with the Islamic faith, tend to guide perceptions of the truth among ethnic Malays.

Ethnic Malays will readily organize and have the support of the group behind their decisions.

“Losing face”, that is, being embarrassed or losing control of one's emotions in public, has negative consequences in Malaysian society.

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.

Ethnic Malays, and most other Malaysians for that matter, try to avoid confrontations. For example, they will not give you a direct answer of “no.” A “yes” that sounds hesitant or weak usually means “no.”

Qualified answers are usually an indication of a “no.” For example, you're probably right to assume that an answer of “yes, but...” means “no.” And, “That might be difficult...” can often mean “no.”

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

Sucking in air through your teeth is one way to signal a definite answer of “no.” In Malaysian 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.

When answering a question that requires a decision, Malaysians are often quick to answer “yes”, even if they don't mean it. This is because a way must be found to deliver the “no” politely, without “loss of face.” Sometimes, a “no” answer is delivered through a third party.

It is considered polite among Malaysian Chinese to offer both the positive and negative possibilities in practically every question that requires a decision. For example, rather than asking, “Would you like to go to the theatre?” they are likely to ask “Do you want to go to the theatre or not?”

Exercise caution when asking Malaysian Chinese certain questions. For example, English speakers give a negative answer to the question “Isn't the document available?” by responding “no.” The intended meaning is: “No, the document is not available.” The Chinese interpretation is different. The answer would be “yes”, meaning “Yes, the document is not available.”

Unlike Westerners, Malaysians of all ethnic groups encourage periods of silence in conversation. A silent pause allows for time to collect one's thoughts; it does not necessarily suggest acceptance or rejection of an idea.

Before answering a question, Malaysian business protocol demands that the respondent allow for 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 a Malaysian has a chance to give a genuine response.

Most states have sultans; the social barriers between royalty and the rest of the population are rarely transgressed. Royal personages are treated with reverence in this culture. Moreover, interacting with royalty involves elaborate ritual and special terms of address.

Since Malaysians--particularly the Chinese--often consult astrologers, signing a contract may be delayed until a “lucky” day arrives.

When doing business in Malaysia, you should never assume, as you might in North America, that a signed contract is a final agreement. Understand that in Malaysian business culture, it is commonplace for negotiations to continue after a contract has been signed.

? You should think of business entertaining in Malaysia as a kind of test. Your Malay hosts will be monitoring you closely; they will do business with you only if they are confident that you want to establish a personal relationship with them.

In the early stages of your visit, you may not receive many social invitations. Nevertheless, remain patient and allow your Malaysian counterparts to initiate these necessary first invitations. Moreover, there is a prevailing belief that you cannot properly host a social event until you have been a guest at a Malaysian event.

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.”

Follow Malaysian business etiquette and respond to any invitations you receive in writing. When sending a response to your Chinese counterparts, red or pink stationery is always a safe choice. Avoid white, black or blue stationery, as these colours have upsetting connotations in Chinese culture.

As a general rule, spouses may be invited to dinners but not to lunch. Business will not, however, be discussed on occasions where spouses are present.

Always wait to be seated; the highest Malaysian officer in attendance or the host is usually in charge of the seating arrangements.

If you are hosting a dinner party or similar event, keep in mind that seating is in hierarchical order, in accordance with Malaysian business protocol. In this seating arrangement, the host should be seated to the immediate left of the most senior guest. This guest is traditionally given the “best seat” at the table--which usually means the one located farthest from the door.

Hotel restaurants are the safest dining option for women travelling alone.

Since service charges are usually included in the bill, tipping is often unnecessary. Restaurants add a 4% service charge, but adding some extra money is a thoughtful and appreciated gesture if the service has been exceptional.

The host or person who initiates the meal is expected to pick up the tab.

Consider it a rare honour to be invited to a Malaysian home. You should arrive up to 30 minutes after the “official” starting time. Guests should bring a gift for the hostess such as a basket of fruits or an assortment of chocolates.

Guests may arrive a few minutes early to a social occasion only when a close friendship has been established. If you are hosting a social event and your guests are close friends, make the effort to be ready early.

Alcohol will not be served at any social event hosted by observant Muslims. Since there won't be a “cocktail hour” on these occasions, expect that the meal will be served close to the time given on the invitation.

Before entering a home or mosque, remove your shoes and sunglasses.

When visiting a Muslim home, you may be seated on the floor. In accordance with Muslim seating protocol, men will sit with their legs crossed while women may sit with their legs either beneath their feet or tucked under their left sides.

The development of a business relationship often centres around food. Therefore, for the sake of politeness, sample everything that is offered--even if you find it unappealing.

Expect to be served some hot and spicy dishes.

Buffets are extremely popular here. Before serving yourself, wait for your host to initiate these proceedings. Men and women may eat separately.

Muslims and Hindus believe that the left hand is unclean. Consequently, eat only with your right hand when dining with these groups. Never touch another person or thing with your left hand if you can use your right hand instead. Moreover, accept gifts and hold money in the right hand. These rules apply even if you are left-handed. Nevertheless, when you have no other realistic alternative, you may use both hands.

Indian utensil etiquette requires that the serving spoon should not touch the plate when either you or another person is putting food on a plate.

Chopsticks should be placed on the chopstick rest after every few bites. They also belong on the chopstick rest when you are drinking or talking.

After the meal, an hour of socializing often takes place.

In Chinese culture, the question "Have you eaten?" is the equivalent to "How are you?" in North America; it's just a superficial inquiry that does not require a literal-minded, detailed answer. Simply answer, "yes" even if you haven't actually eaten.

In most situations, you will be able to determine which foods are restricted based on the person's cultural heritage. For example, your Muslim counterpart will not partake in alcohol or pork, whereas your Hindu or Sikh counterpart will be unable to eat beef.

Always be sensitive to the Muslim belief that dogs are unclean. Moreover, if you are a dog-owner and hosting an event in your home, do not allow your pet to roam free when there are Muslim guests. Also, do not bring your pet dog to any gathering where Muslims will be in attendance.

While you're not supposed to hail a cab by raising your hand in mid-air in this culture, it is the standard gesture for beckoning a server in a restaurant.

With the exception of handshakes, there is no public contact between the sexes in Malaysia. Hugging and kissing--even between husbands and wives--is discouraged 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. Moreover, these actions are interpreted strictly as gestures of friendship.

When meeting a Malay, you may be extended a hand for shaking; sometimes, the person may choose to greet you with a cultural Malay greeting called a "namaste." This gesture involves touching both palms at heart level and making a slight bow. Sometimes the "namaste" will occur after an initial handshake. You can respond in turn by putting your right hand on your heart after shaking hands.

When you are being introduced to a Malaysian woman, be sure to shake hands with her only if she has extended her hand. If she does not extend her hand, a smile and a nod will be the gesture you should use to greet her. Moreover, the namaste is a respectful gesture that should be granted to women of all races.

When introducing a man and a woman, the female's name should be said first.

Just as in most other countries, when presenting a higher-ranking person to a more junior person, the senior person's name is said first.

Always refer to members of parliament as “Your Honourable.”

The highest respect should always be shown to royalty. If you know you are going to meet a royal personage, be sure to go prepared with a gift. Stand with your hands at your sides, unless you are greeting the royal, in which case you must bow with your palms pressed together before you at chest level. Allow any member of royalty to depart a room before you do.

Out of deference, give a slight bow to elderly people you encounter.

When greeting a Malaysian in the morning, the term to use is “Selamat pagi. ” In the afternoon, the appropriate term is “Selamat petang.”

Keep your hands out of your pockets when in public.

When exiting a room, say “Excuse me” and add a slight bow.

When you must indicate something or someone, use the entire right hand [palm out]. You can also point with your right thumb, as long as all four fingers are curled down. Make sure all your fingers are curled; older Malays would interpret a fist with the thumb and a little finger is an insult.

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 an insult.

It is considered rude to point at anyone with the forefinger. Moreover, Malays use the forefinger only to point at animals.

Pounding one fist into the palm of the other hand is another gesture that Malays frequently consider obscene and that should be avoided.

When passing an object, reaching for something or touching someone [such as shaking hands], do so with your right hand. The left hand is considered unclean and should not be used in contact with others to eat or to pass things. This rule applies even if you are left-handed.

Feet are also believed to be unclean. Consequently, never move or touch anything with your feet.

Never point your feet at another person. You will be expected to apologize whenever your shoes or feet touch another person.

Don't show the soles of your feet or shoes. This restriction determines how one sits. You can cross your legs at the knee, but not place one ankle on your knee. Never cross your legs in the presence of Malaysian royalty.

Do not prop your feet up on anything not intended for the feet, such as a desk.

Remove your shoes when entering a home or holy place.

Shoes and hats must be removed before entering a mosque or temple. It is also considered good protocol to step over the threshold rather than on it.

When going to a mosque or temple, dress conservatively. For women, dress should include long pants and/or skirts around the knees or longer, as well as tops with sleeves. Sleeveless tops should be avoided. Women should also have their heads covered. If other people put on a garment similar to a robe before entering, you should do the same.

The head is believed to be the “seat of the soul” by many Indians. Consequently, never touch someone else's head, not even to pat the hair of a child.

Among Indians, tossing the head from side to side actually signals agreement, although Westerners may interpret this gesture as a nod meaning “no.” Be observant, since the Indian head toss is not exactly the same as the Western negative nod that characteristically leads with the jaw.

The “arms akimbo” position, that is, standing tall with your hands on your hips, is always perceived as an angry, aggressive posture.

The comfortable standing distance between two people in India varies with the culture. In general, Hindu Indians tend to stand about 3 or 3 1/2 feet apart.

When pointing at a person or object, the appropriate way to do so is by extending your right hand with your thumb extended and fingers folded under.

Outbursts of laughter are not always indicative of amusement in Malaysian business culture. More often, laughter is used to mask “loss of face”, nervousness, shyness or disapproval.

Use a salute to beckon a taxi.

You are not expected to tip a taxi driver. When paying your fare, however, insist that the driver keep any remaining change in coins.

You are expected to tip porters; one ringgit per piece of luggage is sufficient. It will also be appreciated if you give a tip of 50 sen to those who provide hotel room service for you.

Be aware that Kuala Lumpur, the capital city, has harsh penalties against littering.

Drug trafficking brings a mandatory death penalty.