

# Business etiquette, language & culture

## What to wear

In government offices and multi-national corporations, banks etc. the normal attire for (high level) males is Western. In all other offices “business casual” (trousers & shirt) is the norm. In formal meetings at the strategic level, “business formal” (i.e. jacket, tie, trousers) is the recommended attire.

Use common sense in terms of dressing. Most dress-codes that apply to office wear in the UK apply in Pakistan too; dress soberly (no figure-hugging clothes) and avoid flamboyant wear.

For females the attire is business casual, preferably “shalwar kameez”, with or without a dupatta (a piece of thin cloth draped around the neck or used to cover the head). In higher level business environments, discrete western wear with loose, long tops covering arms and long skirts or trousers works well. Although there is no need for a headscarf or a dupatta, a headscarf is definitely essential if sight-seeing a holy place.

## Greetings

The normal way to greet is to say “Hello Mr ...” followed by a firm handshake. An accompanying smile usually serves to help. It is the convention to use the right and not the left hand when shaking hands and passing or receiving anything. For a woman, shaking hands with males is discretionary.

Expect to be offered tea, coffee or light refreshment – and the preferable response would be to accept, although a refusal will not be seen as a sign of disrespect in an urban setting.

## Food and drink

All meat served in the country will be “Halal” which – other than the way the animal is butchered – signifies nothing else. Pork is banned in the country because of religious considerations. Alcohol is officially banned for Pakistanis, but overseas visitors can get alcohol from large hotels where they are resident, to be consumed on the premises only.

## Ramadan

Once every twelve months of the Islamic Calendar, Muslims observe the month of Ramadan and fast. It is wise not to plan a business trip during the month. With reduced

office working hours in Government and the private sector, it is difficult to get appointments.

## Language

English is the official language to conduct business in Pakistan.

## Meetings and presentations

Most strategic-level meetings happen after 10.00am, and it would be best to set your meetings soon afterwards while attendees are still fresh.

If possible, schedule meetings at least three to four weeks in advance. Since people want to know whom they will be meeting, provide details on titles, positions, and responsibilities of attendees ahead of time. Pakistanis in public offices have little sense of urgency about time and dislike being hurried. Meeting start times may therefore vary – be prepared for meetings to be cancelled or postponed at short notice. Curb the tendency to display your displeasure until you have a relationship on the ground.

Business cards are exchanged after introduction because your host will assess your standing within your company and decide their strategy on conducting the meeting. Visitors should make themselves familiar with local customs before travelling (UKTI Pakistan can help), and care should be taken to respect Muslim conventions.

Photography of sensitive installations, e.g. bridges, airports etc. is prohibited. If in doubt, it's better to ask than regret later!

Third party introductions can be very helpful as a starting point to build a trusting relationship. In Pakistani business culture, the respect a person enjoys depends primarily on his or her age and status. It is crucial to treat elderly people with the greatest respect. Showing status is important since people will take you more seriously.

Source - UKTI

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