

Appropriate Behavior When Visiting an Arab Home

1. It is customary for the guest to bring a gift. The gift should not be an alcoholic beverage; most Arabs are members of the Islamic faith, which forbids the drinking of alcohol.
2. It is important not to admire the possessions of your host too much. According to Arab custom, a host must give his guest any item the guest greatly admires. If a guest praises something forcefully, the host has no choice but to give it to the guest.
3. A good host in an Arab home is supposed to put more food on the table than can possibly be consumed. This is a sign of respect for the guest. To comment that there is too much food would be to ignore this tradition and insult the host.
4. It is customary to eat with your hand—forks and knives are not used. But you should eat with your right hand; the left hand is never used for eating.
5. It is considered an insult to get down to business too quickly. An individual is supposed to show respect and admiration for the other person by first talking about matters other than business.
6. The serving of coffee is a sign of respect and friendship throughout the Arab world. To refuse coffee during a visit is to reject the host.
7. A person should be careful to sit in a way that shows respect for the host. To sit cross-legged, with the bottom of the foot or shoe showing would be insulting to an Arab person.
8. Arabs are accustomed to close contact with others. They feel rejected if the person they are talking to backs away from them, even just a few steps.
9. It is customary to invite a guest to stay longer as the visit draws to a close. This is a sign that the host respects the visitor. Yet it is equally appropriate for the guest to leave soon after being asked to stay. To stay a great deal longer is considered impolite.

From Alan Backler and Robert Hanvey, *Global Geography*. Indiana: Teachers College Press, 1986, pp. 97-98.