

Business Etiquette in India Guide

How greetings, meetings, and hierarchy typically work in Indian business settings — a quick reference to keep handy before your next professional trip.

RELATIONSHIP-FIRST BUSINESS CULTURE

Business in India tends to move at the pace of the relationship behind it — trust and personal rapport often matter as much as the deal terms themselves, especially outside the most internationally standardized industries. Meetings can include more small talk and fewer immediate 'let's get to it' moments than some visitors expect. This guide covers the norms that come up most often.

MEETINGS AND GREETINGS

- A handshake is standard in most business contexts, though some may greet with a namaste (palms together) — follow their lead
- Use titles and last names until invited to use first names
- Business cards are commonly exchanged at the start of a meeting; receive them with your right hand
- Punctuality is appreciated, but meetings themselves may start later or run longer than scheduled
- Hierarchy matters — decisions often flow through the most senior person in the room, even if others lead the discussion

COMMUNICATION STYLE

- A direct 'no' is less common than indirect phrasing like 'we'll try' or 'let's see' — read between the lines on commitments
- Patience with a slower decision-making process tends to pay off better than pushing for an immediate answer
- Written follow-ups after meetings are valued and help confirm what was actually agreed
- Avoid scheduling around major holidays (Diwali, regional festivals) without checking first — many businesses slow down or close
- Small talk about family, travel, or cricket is a normal warm-up before business topics, not a delay tactic

DRESS AND DINING

- Business dress is generally conservative — suits or formal wear for men, modest formal wear for women
- Business meals are common and a genuine part of relationship-building, not just a formality
- If hosted at someone's home, bringing a small gift is appreciated
- Use your right hand for handing over documents, business cards, and food
- Confirm dietary preferences before booking a business meal — many Indian colleagues or clients may be vegetarian or avoid certain meats

