Welcoming the World

A guide for giving great customer service to international visitors
About this booklet

Do you work in a frontline role, meeting and greeting visitors to London? Or would you like to? Do you want to improve your skills in working with international customers? London is already attracting millions of visitors every year, and with the 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games on the horizon, many more will come to our city.

This booklet is designed to help you understand the expectations of these international visitors from a customer service point of view. You will learn about cultural differences, and get an insight into your own attitude – learning to adapt according to the different people you are dealing with. We'll also help you find out a little about different countries and languages so you can really go that extra mile. Read through it in one go or dip into it when you need help and advice – it's up to you. We hope you find it useful.

Welcoming the World

This booklet was written by Heather Barker and edited by RLN London for the ‘Welcoming the World’ initiative.

‘Welcoming the World’ is co-ordinated by RLN London and funded by the London Development Agency. It aims to help people working in frontline roles give great customer service to international visitors. To find out more about the programme and the resources that go with it, visit:

www.rln-london.com/welcoming
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London’s welcome

Each year, London is proud to welcome over 26 million visitors to the Capital. More than 13 million come from outside the UK and the most common countries of origin are the USA, France, Germany, Ireland and Spain. But visitors come from across the globe: every day of the year, London really does ‘welcome the world’.

Visitors come to the Capital on business, on holiday and to visit friends and family. During their stay, however long or short, they want to take advantage of the many things that London has to offer: restaurants, bars, shopping, sightseeing, travel and entertainment, to name just a few.

But will they enjoy their stay? Will they feel welcome and want to come back again? Visitors’ views of London, people living in England and indeed the rest of the UK can be affected by the welcome they receive on arrival and throughout their stay. Will they be:

- Greeted and welcomed as a person?
- Accepted and made to feel that we are pleased that they have come to visit our city?
- Well-regarded and respected throughout their stay?

Paying attention to these things can leave a lasting impression.

One of the challenges faced by anyone working closely with or serving visitors to London is to know how individuals will react, especially when they are in an unfamiliar place and in unfamiliar surroundings. People from different cultures can react in different ways. They often have different expectations and different views of good customer service – of the things that make a difference and make them feel welcome and want to come back.

Remember!
To create a good impression it is important to:
- Offer a warm and friendly welcome
- Show respect
- Provide efficient and helpful service that takes account of cultural needs

Read on to find out how to identify some of these differences and to learn about ways of providing good customer service to all our visitors.
A warm welcome and good customer service

Providing a warm welcome and good customer service to everyone is important but it is not always easy.

Many visitors to London do not have the same cultural background as we do. They often do not speak the same language. Some may have different expectations of service, different ways of ‘doing things’ and different standards. Working with people from different cultures can often mean communicating in different ways. This may sound difficult, but if you develop an understanding of the ways in which you communicate with people from other cultures, and especially those who speak a different language, many of the barriers can be overcome.

You can do this by developing new skills called **intercultural skills**. Simply put, these are the skills that can help you to communicate flexibly and sensitively with people from other cultures. They involve:

- **Knowledge** – awareness and understanding of differences between cultures
- **Attitude** – awareness and understanding of yourself, how you react and the changes you may need to make to communicate effectively
- **The way we act** – adopting ways of working that help you to respond in an appropriate and respectful way

**Why do intercultural skills matter for customer service?**

Good intercultural skills make you more aware of the way other people see you – and the way that you see other people. They can help you to adapt the way you behave and communicate – and help you to react in an appropriate way. There should be fewer misunderstandings, less chance of offending someone and more opportunity to make people feel respected and welcome.

At the same time, it makes your job a lot easier. It can improve your experience at work, develop your skills and help you to shine. **A little knowledge goes a long way!**

**Remember!**

Understanding and taking account of cultural differences is important for good customer service. A major misunderstanding or inappropriate action or reaction can have a serious impact on someone’s view of London, England and the UK. This can make your job even more difficult.
Knowledge
Awareness and understanding of cultural differences

Understanding cultural differences is important for good customer service. How do cultures vary? What specific differences do we need to think about? Try to remember the last time you were in unfamiliar surroundings and saw people from different cultures. You may have noticed that people:

React differently in different situations.
- When someone is frustrated because they are not able to understand, they may sound aggressive and rude.
- Someone may laugh if they find themselves in a difficult situation because they are embarrassed by disagreement or conflict.
- If you have bad news or need to say 'no', people may react in different ways.

Behave in different ways. Some of these differences include:
- How close they will stand to another person.
- Whether and in what circumstances they will touch other people, e.g. shaking hands, kissing or putting a hand on someone’s shoulder.
- How much eye contact they have. Some lower their eyes as a mark of respect; others see lack of eye contact as being untrustworthy.
- How much 'body language' they use, e.g. gestures, smiles, frowns, winks.

Communicate differently by:
- The languages they speak.
- Their accent, either when speaking in their first language or in other languages.
- Their tone of voice.
- Whether there are lots of pauses and silences in a conversation.
- How direct they are.
- How polite they are – whose turn is it to speak?
Have different **customs and habits** such as:

- Politics, religion, history, climate and festivals.
- The way people greet each other – do they use first names or are they more formal?
- The amount of information people will give about their family or personal lives.
- Eating different food at different times, in different ways.
- Different forms of dress.
- Washing.

Have different **attitudes** to:

- Gender.
- Age.
- Status in the community or in the workplace.
- Family and the importance of children.
- Timekeeping.

Have different **expectations** of what should be provided and the way things should be done. For example, they may have religious requirements that influence food, washing and dress.
Knowledge
Thinking about specific cultures

In your life and work you may meet people from many different countries and cultures. It can seem scary to imagine that you might need to understand the differences between each and every culture. But don’t worry. All you need to know is that cultural differences exist and that these affect the way people may react, behave and communicate. You simply need to use your intercultural skills.

Even so, you may find that in your work it helps to know a little more about some specific cultures. You will be able to make customers from these cultures feel especially welcome by, for example, greeting them in their own language or knowing a little about their country.

At the end of this booklet there is a series of country profiles. These cover eleven of the most common countries and cultures for visitors to London and give information on:

- The country and its inhabitants
- The most appropriate way to welcome visitors from the country
- Customer service expectations
- The language and culture

They also include a few useful phrases in the appropriate language, such as ‘hello’, ‘goodbye’, ‘please’ and ‘thank you’.

**Remember!**

Knowing just a little can make a big difference and can help to make visitors feel at home and welcome in London.
Attitudes
Understanding ourselves and our reactions

We sometimes expect people from different cultures to act or react in a particular way. This is because society often shares a fixed and preconceived idea about certain types of people, groups, communities or nationalities. These are known as stereotypes.

But how many ‘good’ qualities are associated with stereotypes? They may have been created out of fear or from negative ideas. They may come from the media and other people’s stories, rather than our own experiences – and be based on wrong information.

Everyone is aware of stereotypes so there is no need to feel guilty, but the danger is that we judge people incorrectly and, as a result, provide services to a ‘type’, not an individual. The most important thing is to see people for who they really are and treat them as individuals.

Remember!

Don’t make assumptions about an individual. Find out about their cultural background, their customs and habits and take account of their individual needs.
Attitudes
Thinking about differences in body language, how we speak and how we listen

Cultures can differ in a number of ways. The way people speak, the way they listen and the body language they use, such as eye contact, gestures, facial expressions and personal distance – these things can all vary.

Ask yourself the following questions. Remember there are no right and wrong answers but your response gives you an indication of how you behave. It may also help you to understand when you might feel uncomfortable with other people or when other people might feel uncomfortable with you.

Think about body language and the use of eye contact, how far apart people stand when they are talking and the amount of physical contact they feel comfortable with.

1. How much direct eye contact do you use? Does using eye contact show respect? Do you use eye contact to show interest and respect for others or does it depend on who it is, their relationship to you and their status?

2. How do you prefer to stand? Do you prefer standing close to someone when speaking with them or a little further apart? Does the distance you stand away change depending on your relationship with the person?

3. How much do you use physical contact? Do your greetings tend to involve close contact (e.g. kisses on the cheek) or do you prefer more limited contact, such as a handshake? Is it normal for you to touch other people when speaking to them (for example, putting your hand on their shoulder) or do you prefer less physical contact?

4. How comfortable are you when others do not behave as you do? For example, how do you feel if someone puts their hand on your shoulder or stands closer than you would wish?
Think about the way people speak and how direct they are in what they say, how expressive they are, and how much formality they use.

1. How direct are you when talking with others? Do you try to make things clear to avoid misunderstandings?

2. How much do you show your feelings when you are talking? Do you use gestures and facial expressions to help you communicate? Does your voice vary (in volume and pitch) depending on how you are feeling? Do you control your voice, whatever your emotions?

3. How do you address people? Are you less formal or more formal (for example, do you prefer to use first names in conversation or do you prefer to use their titles, Mr, Mrs, Miss etc)?

4. How do you react when someone uses an approach, emotions or a style that are different to yours?

Think about differences in the way we listen and how cultures differ in the way they respond to what is being said.

1. When you are listening to someone, do you find you listen to what is said or to how it is said?

2. When you are talking to someone, do you wait until the other person has finished speaking before you speak – or do you start speaking before they have finished? What feels more comfortable for you?

3. Is it important for you to always understand what has been said in a conversation, even if it means asking more questions – or do you feel uncomfortable asking for more information?

Remember!

Ask yourself the questions:
- How comfortable am I when others do not behave as I do?
- How comfortable are other people when I do or say the things that I do?
The way we act and react
Active listening and understanding

Listening is an essential part of understanding and avoiding miscommunication. Here are some hints and tips to help you listen more effectively.

- Be an active listener and **listen carefully**.
- Don’t **assume** you know what the other person is going to say.
- Listen out for any **‘key’ words** that may give you a clue.
- **Ask questions** to help you understand using why, what, where, when and how – to try and find out what the situation is.
- Check to make sure the other person has understood by asking **open questions** (who, what, where and how) rather than questions that just need a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer. Try not to simply ask ‘do you understand?’ Ask someone **how** they will do something, **which** station they will go to etc.
- Watch **body language** and other signs such as facial expressions. A smile often means someone has understood, a frown can mean they are confused.
- Make sure you understand what has been said and **clarify** this by repeating back comments that have been made.
- If you are not sure, **ask more questions** to make sure you understand.
- Don’t be afraid to ask the other person to **repeat** things.

**Remember!**

Listening to what is **really** said can go a long way to overcoming differences between cultures.
The way we act and react
Looking at ways of communicating effectively

We communicate with other people in two ways: through speaking and through writing. Here are some tips that may help you to communicate more effectively – many of which are the same for both spoken and written communications.

When speaking:
- Use simple words and sentences.
- Use active language – ask questions such as who, how, where and when.
- Speak clearly and not too quickly.
- Use pauses so that people have time to understand what you are saying.
- Don’t shout.
- Use single ‘key’ words to make sure others understand you.
- Use body language – hand signals, miming, etc – to make yourself clear.
- Use different prompts, such as maps, objects, pictures etc, to show what you mean.
- If necessary, repeat things to make sure they are clear.
- Don’t use jargon or slang or try to make jokes.
- If someone really does not understand, get help and try to find a colleague who speaks their language to interpret.

Remember!
Speaking clearly and concisely and using simple key words gets the message across and avoids misunderstandings. But always check that the other person has understood what you have said.
If you find yourself in a difficult situation:

- **Acknowledge** the other person’s concerns.
- Try to **stay calm**.
- Don’t raise your **voice** and try to keep your tone of voice **controlled**.
- Ask if there is someone else they would like to talk to for **help**.
- **Do not blame** the other person for any misunderstanding. Try to resolve it.

**When putting things in writing:**

- Use **simple** words and sentences.
- Use **active** language.
- Use single **key words**.
- Use **diagrams and pictures** to show what you mean.
- Don’t use **jargon**.
- Write in **lower case** – it is easier to read (e.g. Welcome, not WELCOME).
- Give people **time** to absorb written information before you ask a question.
- Check to make sure the other person understands by **asking open questions**.
- If someone really does not understand, try to **find a colleague** who speaks their language to translate the information.

**Remember!**

Written words can be confusing. It is important to make sure that you check if someone has understood what has been written down. Pointing to words, for example on a menu, can help.
The way we act and react
Showing awareness of and respect for differences

Different cultures may behave in different ways and it is important to respect those differences. This may mean adapting the way you behave and act in order to take account of other people’s reactions.

- Treat people as individuals and with respect.

- Be alert to key areas of difference such as:
  - Attitudes to personal space
  - Levels of physical contact
  - Levels of eye contact
  - Different customs affecting eating, washing etc.
  - Attitudes to status and age

  – and make sure you respond appropriately.

- Be careful with any physical contact, such as putting your hand on someone’s shoulder. Take the lead from the other person.

- Be aware of space – and take care not to get too close to someone.

- Watch out for any reactions – this will help you to know how to respond in many different situations.

- Be prepared. Make sure you know which cultures and customs you are likely to come across and try to find out how these different cultures might respond in different ways to different situations.

  Remember!

  Showing respect for differences is a vital part of good customer service.

- Aim for a positive ending in any encounter with customers. This will make them feel valued, respected and welcome.
Some final tips

Here are some reminders on how to develop the **intercultural skills** that will help you play your part in ‘welcoming the world’ to London.

**Raise awareness and build cultural knowledge**
- Learn the ways in which people from different cultures communicate, such as greetings, gestures and body language.
- Build your knowledge by watching others, talking about different traditions and using information sources such as books and the Internet.
- Learn a little more about the cultures you are most likely to come into contact with.

**Understand your own views but learn to see and respect the other person’s perspective**
- You certainly have preferences in the way you communicate. Be careful not to make judgements about people based on these.
- Be open to other ways of communicating. Ask yourself, ‘What would I be thinking if I were the other person in an unfamiliar situation right now?’

**Be prepared**
- Whatever happens, stay calm and keep a level tone of voice.
- Be friendly and try not to change your position and the way you stand.
- Smile – but make sure the person does not think you are laughing at them.

**Take a ‘mental’ step back from the situation**
- If you find yourself frustrated or offended by what someone says, try not to take things personally.
- Ask yourself, ‘Could this be a difference in communication style?’
Treat people as individuals

▪ Try not to treat someone as a member of a group – treat them as an individual.
▪ If you find yourself treating someone as if they are typical of a group, try to think of that person as an individual, just like you.
▪ Stop and think about the individual’s cultural background. It can provide interesting clues about how that person may behave.
▪ Make sure you check their understanding of a situation.
▪ Always check whether the person needs further help.

Keep trying – practice builds confidence

▪ You almost certainly change the way you communicate depending on who you are talking to (a friend, a family member, a colleague). Communicating effectively with people from different cultures just means making a few more changes.
▪ At first, you may have to work hard to change your natural way of communicating, but with time and practice it becomes much easier.
▪ Don’t be afraid of making mistakes. Few mistakes damage or threaten relationships.
▪ As you develop your intercultural skills you will know how to do things better next time.

Want to learn more about the culture of your international customers? Would you like to search for a translator or recruit multilingual people for your business?

Go to the **RLN London Service Finder** where you’ll be able to search free of charge for language course providers, job agencies and specialist services for languages and culture.

[www.rln-london.com/servicefinder](http://www.rln-london.com/servicefinder)
Country profiles

These profiles cover eleven of the most common countries and cultures for visitors to London and give information on:

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China
France
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Spain
USA
Welcome

Unlike the Japanese or Koreans, Chinese people no longer bow in greeting and will shake your hand instead. When greeting Chinese people, it is polite to address the oldest person in the group first. Don’t be concerned if a Chinese person does not look you in the eye when greeting them – it is a sign of respect.

Chinese names traditionally begin with the surname, followed by the first name. You should use their title and surname, so if you were to meet Zhang Ziyi, you would greet her as Miss or Ms Zhang. Many Chinese take a Western name if they were born or spend a lot of time abroad. For example, you may know Liú Yúlíng better as Lucy Liu.

2008 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games
After the 2008 Games take place in Beijing, there will be great interest in London as the hosts of the 2012 Games: expect large numbers of Chinese visitors.

The Language

Hello
*Néen hōw*
您好

Goodbye
*Dzàee jỳàrn*
再见！

Please
*Chìng*
请

Thank you
*Shyèr shyèr*
谢谢

Many younger people have learned English, but do be patient in conversation. It may be difficult for them to pronounce certain words as there are some sounds in English that don’t exist in Chinese.

Mandarin Chinese is spoken by 70% of the population and is the official language of China, although there are many different dialects of Chinese. Chinese languages are written using picture-style characters (logograms) instead of letters. Mandarin Chinese is the most spoken language in the world.
The Culture

The Chinese will appreciate it if you know a little about their history, traditions and values. Three features of Chinese culture are Confucianism, mianzi and guanxi.

- **Confucianism** is an ancient ethical and philosophical system and the cornerstone of traditional Chinese culture. It offers a way of behaving to promote harmony and the social good. Appropriate behaviour will change depending on the relationship people have with one another. For example, parents have a higher standing than their children but there are also gender, age and even birth order differences.

- **Mianzi**, or saving face, is about preserving the honour and respect of an entire group. This may include not answering a question or even laughing nervously if they are in an awkward situation. If you find yourself in such a situation, it is polite to change the subject and take the attention away from them or the problem.

- **Guanxi**, or respect for connections and relationships. You may find that a group will rely on one spokesperson, even if you are serving another member of that group.

Customer Service Advice

The Chinese value politeness and courteous greetings as a demonstration of respect. If this is their first time abroad, they may not be familiar with British products, labels or sizes and will appreciate it if you give them information about your product. Brand names and famous labels are important as well as getting a good bargain.

The Chinese are great hosts and will often entertain large groups of people, especially in restaurants. Remember that they may not be used to eating with Western cutlery and may appreciate you offering them chopsticks.

Almost one third of the world’s smokers are Chinese. Two out of every three Chinese men smoke cigarettes. There are very few non-smoking rules in China, so be prepared to explain the UK’s smoking ban.

**Did you know?**

Paper, printing, umbrellas, playing cards, the compass and the wheelbarrow were all invented in China.
DO try to say a few words in Chinese as it will be appreciated.

DO help to explain a menu if it looks like someone is struggling to understand. British food may be unfamiliar to many Chinese people.

DO bear in mind that Chinese people tend not to show emotion through their facial expressions. You might need to look for other clues to judge what they are feeling.

DO avoid drawing attention to Chinese visitors. They tend to be modest and prefer not to stand out from the group.

The Dragon of Asia

The People’s Republic of China is the fourth largest country in the world and has the world’s largest population.

China has had a history that spans over 5,000 years and has experienced many different political regimes. Recently China has made huge political and economical changes and has the fastest growing economy in the world.

Key Facts

- Population - approx 1,325,000,000
- Capital City – Beijing
- Languages – Mandarin Chinese (70%), Cantonese, Shanghainese, Mongolian, Tibetan, Uyghur
- Religions – Buddhists 50%, Taoists 30%, Christians 3%, Muslims 1.5%, agnostics 14%
- Currency – Yuan (abbreviated RMB)
- Exchange Rate – RMB 14.1 = £1.00
- Dialling Code – +86
- Time Difference – GMT+8

Where to go next

For more information about welcoming international visitors to London, visit www.rln-london.com/welcoming

RLN London’s Service Finder can help you find language and cultural services – including translation, detailed cultural briefing and language training. www.rln-london.com/servicefinder

Remember!
These are general guidelines on how people from different cultures might act and the customer service they might expect. They can’t predict every individual’s behaviour in every situation.
Welcome

The best way of welcoming people from France is to greet them individually with a simple ‘bonjour’ (see Useful Phrases below) or ‘bonsoir’ (‘good evening’). Handshakes are the most common form of greeting, especially among people who do not know each other. When greeting friends or family, the French will exchange kisses on both cheeks.

When addressing the French, it is polite to call them Monsieur (mur-syur) – Mr, Madame (madam) – Ms/Mrs, followed by their surname, until they invite you to use their first name. Your guests will be especially impressed and appreciative if you make the effort to address them with their French titles.

France is the UK’s nearest European neighbour. With direct train, air and ferry links, there are large numbers of French tourists in the UK at any given time.

The Language

The French are proud of their language and its history as the first language of diplomacy and science for many years. It also shares some roots with English. Many people outside France around the world still use French in their everyday lives, either as a first language or as a common second or official language. Use of a few phrases in French is generally appreciated by a native French speaker.

Many older people have never learned English. Younger generations are more likely to understand English, but they may not try to speak unless they are confident they will get it right. Though they will have learned British English in school, they may struggle to understand strong accents or slang.

Did you know?

France is the most visited country in the world, hosting more than 79 million tourists every year.
The Culture

The French people are passionate about debate, food and life itself. France is especially well known for its café culture, restaurants and cuisine. Croissants, baguettes, cheese and wine, all popular symbols of French culture, are part of their everyday diet. Meals are important and never rushed: lunches and dinners will often last two or more hours and tend to be shared with friends or family.

The French place a lot of importance on family and relationships. They love spending time with friends, having intellectual discussions and debates about anything from politics to philosophy or even football.

There is a strong sense of national identity and pride in the prestige and the importance of French language and culture across the world.

Customer Service Advice

The customer is greatly valued in France. An individual, warm and attentive welcome is expected.

French breakfasts are usually a croissant or bread with jam or butter, taken with coffee. There is no equivalent to the ‘full English breakfast’ in France. They tend to avoid fast food and prefer to eat regularly, with lunch at around 12pm and dinner between 7 and 9pm. Although different cuisines are being introduced throughout France, many French people prefer to stick with what they already know.

Most French tourists like to buy a few very good quality items, rather than a larger number of poorer quality items. If they are considering buying an unfamiliar brand or label, they may ask a lot of questions.

- **DO** offer advice or information about wine if it does not come from France.
- **DO** inform customers whether a service charge has been included or not, as French people are used to it always being included in the bill.
- **DO** chat if you can about French sports figures or other famous French people.
- **DO** greet French people as soon as you notice them.
- **DO** use a few French words when greeting or thanking French people. It is appreciated.
- **DO** speak quite directly to them as they might not understand British indirectness.
France

Liberté, égalité, fraternité – the French national motto

France is the largest country in the EU and has 22 regions. While the capital, Paris, is the largest city in France, other major cities include Lyon, Marseille, Nice, Lille and Strasbourg.

France’s economy is the world’s fifth largest. Its empire was once the world’s second largest behind Britain’s, covering nearly 9% of the globe.

France continues to have a close relationship with many of its former colonies. Some are officially recognised as part of France.

Key Facts

- **Population** – approx 61,700,000
- **Capital City** – Paris
- **Language** – French
- **Religions** – Catholics 51%, Muslims 4%, Protestants 3%, Jews 1%, others 10%, agnostics 31%
- **Currency** – Euro
- **Exchange Rate** – €1.34 = £1.00
- **Dialling Code** – +33
- **Time Difference** – GMT+1

Where to go next

For more information about languages, culture and welcoming international visitors to London, visit: [www.rln-london.com/welcoming](http://www.rln-london.com/welcoming)

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'Welcoming the World’ is an initiative which aims to help people in frontline roles to give great customer service to international visitors. RLN London has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this country profile, which is one of a wider series. However, views or opinions presented by the contributing author do not necessarily represent those of RLN London.

Remember!

These are general guidelines on how people from different cultures *might* act and the customer service they *might* expect. They can’t predict every individual’s behaviour in every situation.
Welcome

Welcome your German guests by saying Willkommen ‘vil-koh-men’, meaning ‘welcome’. This greeting is followed by the guest’s title and surname unless you know them well. Using the German version of their title will be especially appreciated, so ‘Herr’ (Hair) for ‘Mr’ or ‘Frau’ (Frow) for ‘Mrs/Ms’ followed by their surname, e.g. Willkommen Herr Schmidt. It is also customary to greet guests including children, with a quick, firm handshake.

Germans like to travel more than any other European nationality and the United Kingdom is a popular destination. Most Germans’ knowledge of other countries, including the United Kingdom, is good and they have a keen interest in other cultures and societies.

The Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello</td>
<td>Guten Tag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodbye</td>
<td>Auf Wiedersehen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Please</td>
<td>Dan-ker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
<td>Danke</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

English is taught at school in Germany and most young people will be very comfortable speaking it. Be patient with the older generation, who may be slightly more hesitant. Although their level of English is generally good, they may struggle to understand a strong accent or idiom.

German is the second most widely-spoken language in the European Union, one of the official languages of the European Commission and the third most popular foreign language taught around the world.

Did you know?
Karl Benz is generally acknowledged as the inventor of the automobile, which he first built in 1885.
The Culture

In public, good manners and a serious attitude, avoiding displays of emotion, are the norm. Fairness, equality and honesty are highly valued. Directness is a feature of German conversation, in stark contrast with the convoluted British way of talking (“Would you mind terribly if …?”). This can come across as blunt or impolite, but it is not generally intended in this way.

There is a clear separation between work and home life: socialising tends to revolve around the family.

The Germans value their national identity, and are very proud of their reputation for hard work, efficiency and the achievements that are associated with their country. These include good beer, engineering, medical and scientific goods, car manufacturing and being a member of a united Europe.

There is a great affection for the British and their sense of humour.

Customer Service Advice

Good customer service, characterised by punctuality, efficiency and organisation, is very important. This means that they expect you to be exactly on time. For example, if you agree to lead a tour at 10.00, you should be ready to start at precisely 10.00, not 10.05. If you are late, even if it’s only a couple of minutes, a German customer may think you cannot manage your time very well.

You are expected to act professionally, to be fully informed and prepared for all eventualities. If you have forgotten something that prevents you from delivering your service precisely as agreed, they may question your ability to provide the service at all.

Misinformation, a change of plans or starting a new task before finishing the first one may frustrate or annoy a German customer: for example, if the entry fee to a tourist attraction is not displayed or the price of a tube fare is not made clear.
Germany

- DO provide detailed information on all aspects of their stay. Written materials like brochures are especially useful.
- DO ensure that the establishment is clean and well organised
- DO provide recycling facilities for German customers as they are very environmentally aware.
- DO be prepared for a much more direct communication style.

Germany Reunited

Germany has the largest population in the European Union and has 16 regions. Its economy is the world’s third largest, after the US and Japan.

Germany has led the way in developing relationships with many of the EU’s newest members, especially those in Eastern Europe. Germany is the home to the largest number of immigrants in Europe, both in terms of the proportion and number of people in the population.

Where to go next

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Remember!

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Key Facts

- Population – approx 82,200,000
- Capital City – Berlin (since reunification in 1990)
- Language – German
- Religions – Protestants 31%, Catholics 31%, Muslims 4%, others 8%, agnostics 30%
- Currency – Euro
- Exchange Rate – €1.34 = £1.00
- Dialling Code – +49
- Time Difference – GMT+1
Welcome

A warm and friendly greeting is greatly appreciated by Indian people. The traditional greeting is to place the palms of your hands together in front of you and say ‘Namaste’, which comes from Sanskrit and means ‘I bow to you’. They will do the same.

Times are changing though and many Indians will now simply shake your hand. Some women may prefer to simply nod and say hello. Don’t be surprised if their handshake is gentler than you would ordinarily expect as this is good manners in India.

Indians may be more familiar with the term ‘good name’, which means ‘your surname’. It is not unusual for Indians to call you by your first name and your title, so you may call someone Mr. Sanjay or Ms. Reena and you may become Mr. James or Ms. Sarah.

The Language

English is widely spoken in India and although grammar, sentence structure and word use may differ, it is not generally difficult to understand. Words used may at times appear formal: this is due to an emphasis on traditional language in the teaching of English.

Hindi and English are both official languages of India. There are 22 recognised regional languages, including Bengali, Panjabi, Marathi, Kannada and Telugu; and two classical languages, Sanskrit and Tamil.

Did you know?
More people from India speak English than any other country, including the USA.
India

The Culture

There are many regional differences within India, in terms of language, religion, geography and local customs. People show a great respect for each other’s position in life and in particular towards older people. Family unity, obligation and respect are very important and help define where people fit within Indian society.

Maintaining harmony and displays of politeness are also important. Silence or trying to change the subject is usually preferable to the direct approach, particularly if you have to deliver bad news or say ‘no’.

Did you know?

There are over 10 million Indians living outside India, including 2 million people of Indian descent living in the UK.

Customer Service Advice

Indian people appreciate efficient service and the personal touch during their travels.

Each religion of India has its own dietary rules and it is best to check customers’ dietary requirements in advance. As a general rule, avoid offering beef, as the cow is a sacred animal in many parts of India. Make sure you offer a number of vegetarian options.

Be careful when recommending an Indian restaurant in the UK. British-Indian restaurants serve a range of food from different Indian regions, as well as modern ‘fusion’ cuisine. Not all of these restaurants will suit your customers’ palate, so take a little time to find out about what is offered locally.

- **DO** be patient. Indian people have a more flexible attitude to time; arriving late and rearranging timings is considered acceptable.
- **DO** ensure you use the words ‘yes’ or ‘no’ instead of just nodding your head.
- **DO** use your right hand to serve food and shake hands.
- **DO** remember that shaking the head from left to right can mean ‘yes’, be used to emphasise a point or show agreement or understanding.
India Shining

India is the seventh largest country in the world and has the second highest population. India’s large English-speaking population have made it popular with businesses in recent years. Over 45% of the world’s software engineers are from India and many Western companies now locate their contact centres in the country.

The film industry, known as Bollywood, produces more movies than any other country in the world.

India is the world’s largest democracy and has the second fastest growing economy. The improved economic situation has helped many Indians to travel abroad and, for some, this may be their first trip to the UK. Many others however have been travelling for decades, visiting family and friends all over the world and in particular in the UK because of strong social and family ties.

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Italy

Welcome

Italians have a reputation for a charming openness, warmth and welcome. They will expect you to shake their hand, looking directly into their eyes, which is seen as an expression of sincerity.

You may find that they stand much closer to you than you expect and may touch you on the arm or shoulder when speaking. Try not to step away as it could be interpreted as being rude or uninterested.

It is usual for them to use their hands to help them express their words and add emphasis and emotion.

Italians have been visiting the British Isles since Roman times and are currently the sixth most frequent visitors to London.

Did you know?
The piano, thermometer, eye glasses, typewriter and the ice cream cone were all invented in Italy.

The Language

Italian is widely used and understood by Italians but around half of all Italians speak a regional dialect at home.

The most popular second language at school is now English but older people may not speak it and will always appreciate it if you can say a few words in Italian.

Hello

Bwon-jor-no
Buongiorno

Goodbye

Ah-ree-veh-dair-chee
Arrivederci

Please

Pur fah-vor-reh
Per favore

Thank you

Gra-tsee-yeh
Grazie
DO be flexible when scheduling reservations or museum visits as attitudes to timekeeping are relaxed.

DO try to relax, laugh and enjoy yourself, it will be appreciated.

DO feel free to talk about yourself and your family to build up a relationship with your Italian customers.

DO be confident in what you say and do.

DO maintain eye contact when speaking to Italians as this is a sign of honesty and sincerity.

DO remember to pay particular attention to the design and colours of printed literature and the presentation of your service.
Italy

Relationships are important in any context, so try to make an effort even if your contact with them is brief. You can usually discuss things like holiday plans, personal preferences or ask questions about their family and what they do.

Viva Italia

Italy as we know it today was only united in 1861. Before then, it was a collection of kingdoms and small independent city-states. In fact, San Marino and the Vatican, both wholly within Italy’s borders, remain independent to this day.

Although Italy has opened its doors to immigrants, about 95% of the population was born in the country. Many Italians have moved from Italy to other countries in Europe, North and South America. Almost 10 million people left Italy before the beginning of World War I and are now spread throughout the world. Family ties between emigrants and their families back in Italy are often strong.

Key Facts

- Population – approx 60,000,000
- Capital City – Rome
- Language – Italian
- Religions – Catholics 88%, Other Christians 3%, Muslims 1.4%, others <1%
- Currency – Euro
- Exchange Rate – €1.34 = £1.00
- Dialling Code – +39
- Time Difference – GMT+1

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Welcome

The Japanese word for ‘customer’ translates as ‘the invited’ or ‘guest’, showing the special status they give to their own customers. Customer service in Japan is of a high standard, and so the same is expected abroad. Saying ‘Youkoso oide kudasai mashita’ which means ‘welcome’ is a great way to make them feel more at home.

When travelling, the usual greeting is a slight nod of the head or a handshake, which you should politely return. In Japan, people greet each other with a bow but they don’t expect foreigners to do this. However, if you are greeted with a bow, then do try to return it.

When addressing the Japanese, use a title followed by their surname. You can show more respect by simply adding the word ‘San’ after their surname. So, for example, when addressing someone called Yoshi Nobu, say ‘(Mr) Nobu San’ to show you understand a little about Japanese culture.

Many Japanese people prefer to travel in large groups for short excursions and organised events. Shopping expeditions for designer brands and bargains are particularly popular activities.

The Language

Hello
Konnichi wa
こんにちは
Youkoso oide kudasai mashita
ようこそおいでくださいました

Goodbye
Zehi mata okoshi kudasai
是非またお越しください

Please
Douzo
どうぞ

Thank you
Arigatou gozaimasu
ありがとうございます

Spoken by over 130 million people, Japanese is a unique language with its own script.

English is not widely spoken, so please be patient in conversation. English is studied at school, but the focus is on reading and writing rather than speaking.

Aim to provide translated information and include images wherever possible.
Japan

The Culture
To many westerners, the Japanese may appear quiet, discreet and reserved. In fact, once you get to know them, you will find that the Japanese are a very warm, open and accommodating group of people. Honour and etiquette are very important to them and this will be reflected in the way they behave and treat you. *Wa* and *kao* are two very important Japanese values which ensure that honour and etiquette are preserved.

**Wa**, or ‘harmony’. This is such a valued concept that people in Japan will tend to avoid saying ‘no’. So don’t always take ‘yes’ to really mean ‘yes’ as they may just be afraid of causing offence.

**Kao** – To save face, the Japanese tend to avoid criticism and confrontation. When *kao* is threatened, they will often respond with laughter to hide their feelings of embarrassment or disagreement.

Customer Service Advice
The Japanese tend to like things in moderation. Order, organisation, cleanliness and good service are seen as more important than luxuries.

Complaints may not always be expressed very directly, so try asking more open questions to resolve any problems as quickly as possible.

Most Japanese appreciate being given options before making a decision. For example, when offering a drink or a meal, explain what is available before asking what they would like.

**DO** keep a reasonable personal distance and avoid touching. Personal space is important.

**DO** avoid confrontation or openly showing negative emotions.

**DO** smile and say ‘thank you’ frequently.

**DO** say ‘yes’ if you are asked to be in a photo as they like to have a memory of people they meet abroad.

**DO** offer small souvenirs. For example, a pen with the name of the hotel or a card from the restaurant.

**DO** avoid using your hands when you speak or any other large gestures or facial expressions.

**DO** wrap any purchased items carefully in tissue paper before putting them in a bag.

**DO** avoid anything that uses the number four, as most Japanese associate this number with death.
The Land of the Rising Sun

Japan is known as the land of the rising sun. Although it is made up of over 3,000 islands, Japan has some of the most crowded urban areas in the world as the majority of the population lives on only a few of the islands.

Japan has the second largest economy in the world after the USA and is known for its exports such as cars and electronics. Japan has its own particular customs and traditions: you may be familiar with geishas, bonsai trees and their very intricate tea ceremonies.

Today Japanese culture is a unique blend of East and West. Tradition and heritage are still very important but are increasingly combined with more modern customs.

Key Facts

- **Population** – 127,463,611
- **Capital city** – Tokyo
- **Official language** - Japanese
- **Religions** – Shinto & Buddhism
- **Currency** – Yen
- **Exchange Rate** – 100 Yen = £0.47
- **Dialling Code** – +81
- **Time Difference** – GMT+9

Where to go next

For more information about languages, culture and welcoming international visitors to London, visit: [www.rln-london.com/welcoming](http://www.rln-london.com/welcoming)

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Welcome

Hospitality, as a host or a guest, is very important throughout the Middle East and a friendly and welcoming greeting is expected. Saying ‘al salaam aleikum’ – which literally means ‘peace be with you’ - is the usual form of greeting. The response is ‘wa aleikum salaam’ which means ‘and also with you’.

The usual greeting between men is a handshake with the right hand, although when meeting family and friends, members of the same sex will kiss each other on the cheeks. It is always best to follow a woman’s lead when greeting her: some women will shake your hand but others will simply nod. It is important to show respect to women and be aware that men may speak on behalf of family members as a matter of honour and protection.

As a mark of respect, it is advisable to use their surname when speaking as this often refers to their ancestral village or family history. Take the time to learn to pronounce it correctly. When introduced, they will often reply using your first name and title, so that you become ‘Mr. Michael’ or ‘Miss/Mrs./Ms. Susan’.

As temperatures can reach 50°C, people from the Middle East often travel away from home during the summer months. London is a popular destination.

The Language

Hello
Marhaba
مرحبا

Goodbye
Ma’ass’salama
مع السلام

Please
Min fadhlik
من فضلك

Thank you
Shukran laka (m) / Shukran laki (f) *
شكرًا لك / شكرًا لك

*Choose the phrase marked (m) if you are talking to a male and (f) if you are speaking to a female.

Arabic is used by over 200 million speakers across the world. It is the official language of much of the Middle East, the countries of northern Africa and the Arabian peninsula. As the religious language of Islam, it is also the second language of millions of Muslims around the world.

There are many regional dialects of Arabic in the Middle East, and French is widely spoken in the Lebanon. Arabic script is written and read right to left, so bear in mind that it may take extra time for people to absorb information written in English.

Most men and younger women speak and understand English well, but pronunciation may sometimes be difficult to follow. If you do not understand, it is more polite to say ‘Sorry, I didn’t hear you’ than ‘Can you say that more slowly or clearly?’
The Culture

The majority of countries in the Middle East are Arabic-speaking and share the same official religion, Islam. It is impossible to understand the Middle East without understanding a little about Islam. If Muslims do not have the chance to attend a mosque they may request a quiet, private place to pray in, and remember that Friday is their holy day.

Muslim men and women are expected to be polite and modest, especially in the way they dress. Though women wear ‘Hijab’, which means modest dress, this does not mean that they must wear a veil, called ‘abaya’, or a headscarf, though many choose to do so.

Although men may speak on behalf of women and other family members, decisions about sightseeing and restaurants, for example, take account of the needs of the whole family.

Customer Service Advice

A high standard of customer service is expected. If the reality falls short, there may be a quick reaction, which can seem dismissive and cause misunderstandings. Simply remain patient and work to resolve the situation.

People throughout the Middle East are good at negotiating, and will often ask for a discount for the slightest imperfection. Quality is important, as are prestigious brands.

- **DO** give and take things with your right hand as the left hand is considered unclean.
- **DO** expect Arab families to spend all evening at a restaurant, very small children included.
- **DO** find out if it is ‘Ramadan’, when adult Muslims have to fast, with no food or water, from sunrise to sunset.
- **DO** make it possible for food to be shared among everyone at the table as this is the tradition in the Middle East. A little food is left on each plate when finished.
- **DO** remember that Muslims do not drink alcohol or eat pork.
- **DO** be prepared to explain the smoking ban, as smoking is very common and not restricted in the Middle East.

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**5 Pillars of Islam**

- **Shahada** – profession of faith
- **Salat** – prayer 5 times per day
- **Zakat** – giving alms
- **Sawm** – fasting during Ramadan
- **Hajj** – pilgrimage to Mecca

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Created by Communicaid [www.communicaid.com](http://www.communicaid.com)  
Edited by RLN London  
Accurate as of April 2008
The Arabian Peninsula

The Middle East is traditionally defined from Egypt in the West to the Arabian (Persian) Gulf in the East. 65% of the world’s oil is found in this region.

Although many people think of the Middle East as a single region, each country is different. Their cultures and history vary considerably, so it is worth spending time learning about each one.

Many people in the Middle East have adapted from an existence as desert settlers to life in very modern cities in little more than a generation, yet have retained their own traditions and royal families.

Key Facts

- **Countries** – Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, United Arab Emirates, Yemen
- **Population** – approx 200,000,000
- **Religions** – Muslims 90%, Christians 5% (40% in Lebanon)

Where to go next

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Poland

Welcome
When greeting your Polish guests, it is polite to shake hands and make clear eye contact with both women and men. Use the appropriate title followed by their surname, for example ‘Mr Adamski’. Poland still has a relatively traditional culture, so you should usually introduce women first. When leaving, it is also polite to shake hands with everyone.

You may find that they stand relatively close to you and that they may also touch you when speaking. This is an expression of sincerity, so try not to move away in this situation.

The Language

Hello
Tsheshch
Cześć

Goodbye
Daw vidzenya
Do widzenia

Please
Prosheh
Proszę

Thank you
Jen-kooyeh
Dziękuję

English is now studied as a second language in schools and spoken by the majority of younger people. The older generation, educated in the Communist era, are more likely to have learned Russian.

Polish is the most widely spoken Slavic language after Russian and is spoken in most homes in the country. Many sounds in Polish have no exact equivalent in English. Reading Polish can seem very difficult as the words are often very long and to the English speaker may seem to have unusual combinations of letters. Being able to say a few words of Polish will be sincerely appreciated.

The Culture

The Polish people take great pride in their heritage. Two major events in the country’s recent history are also important to them: the election of the first Polish Pope, Karol Wojtyla, who became Pope John Paul II in 1978; and the successful move to a strong, market-driven economy after the

Did you know?
Poles have been settling in the UK since the 18th century. The Polish Government in exile was established in London in 1939 and only dissolved after free elections were held in Poland in 1991.
Poland

Communist government fell in 1989. Polish people living in the country or elsewhere in the world have been involved in many significant artistic and scientific achievements over the years. Knowing a little about key historical moments or people in Poland will help you interact with visitors.

Catholicism is the main religion practised in Poland and remains a part of most Poles’ lives, although fewer people go to church than in the past. Nevertheless, national holidays are based on Catholic traditions with Christmas and Easter being particularly important holidays.

Family is a strong focus for Polish life. If you are invited to use a first name, you are then considered a family friend and have been welcomed into the inner circle.

Customer Service Advice

Honesty, tidiness and order as well as good value for money are what Polish tourists look for. Detailed information about your product or service is considered more important than your presentation style.

Expect direct questions and a straightforward communication style, and remember this is not meant to sound impolite. Traditional good manners and punctuality are valued.

- **DO** try to learn a few key phrases in Polish, especially words like ‘hello’ or ‘goodbye’.
- **DO** try to smile often and make direct eye contact.
- **DO** allow Polish people time to relax during and after a meal. They do not like to be rushed and might expect the place to close only once they have finished.
- **DO** be prepared to remind Poles about the UK smoking ban as they will not be used to smoking restrictions.
Poland’s Progress

Poland has had a turbulent history. It first united as a kingdom in 1025, but has lost and gained its independence several times, most recently during World War II. Poland was amongst several countries that broke away from Communist Rule after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

Poland joined the European Union in 2004. Its economy is one of the fastest growing in Europe – benefiting both from opportunities at home and from revenue generated by those supporting their families abroad.

Almost 20 million Polish people live abroad, including 10 million people in the USA, 3 million in Germany, and up to 1 million in the UK.

Key Facts

- **Population** – approx 38,500,000
- **Capital City** – Warsaw
- **Language** – Polish
- **Religions** – Catholics 97%, others <1% each
- **Currency** – Polish Zloty (PLN)
- **Exchange Rate** – 4.20 PLN = £1
- **Dialling Code** – +48
- **Time Difference** – GMT+1

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Welcome

Russians will expect a very firm handshake and direct eye contact when you greet them. You may see Russian men hugging or slapping each other on the back and women exchanging kisses – but this happens in the main between friends and family. Try to be as formal and polite as possible and give as much individual attention to Russian visitors as you can.

You should use their title and surname until you are invited to use their first name, which may only be once they get to know and trust you. Russians usually have three names – their first name, a name derived from their father’s name and finally their surname, so don’t be surprised when they use all three. Women’s surnames usually end with an ‘-a’.

The Language

More English is being taught in schools now, but this is a relatively recent development. Don’t expect many older people to have a high level of English – try to speak slowly and be patient.

Hello
Privyet
Привет

Goodbye
Dosvidanya
До свиданья

Please
Pazhalooista
Пожалуйста

Thank you
Spasyibaw
Спасибо

Russian is spoken as a first language by about 80% of the Russian population as well as many people who live in parts of the former Soviet Union or neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe. It is written in the Cyrillic alphabet, as in the phrases shown here.

Russia officially recognises about 100 regional languages.

Did you know?
There are more graduates of higher education in Russia than anywhere else in Europe. Over 1.4 million Russians have earned at least one degree.
Russia

The Culture

Russians take great pride in their country and have strong national values. Their achievements as a global superpower are a source of pride. Theirs was the first country to send someone into space and they have given the world some of its best chess players, such as Boris Spassky and Gary Kasparov.

They often place a high value on the arts and some of the world’s finest museums can be found in Russia, such as the Hermitage Museum in Saint Petersburg.

Russians view the family as very important and will turn to them when making important decisions. Families are often small and live together in small city apartments, so will particularly appreciate spacious accommodation while in the UK.

Customer Service Advice

Russians visiting the UK expect high levels of service. An increasingly large number of Russian visitors have high disposable incomes that give them access to luxurious services and surroundings.

Visitors will appreciate a calm, formal and polite welcome with straightforward answers to their questions, rather than small talk. Remember that it is not their custom to automatically smile at strangers – though they will smile when they get to know you better.

- **DO** remember that they use a different alphabet and may take time or need assistance in reading notices or brochures.
- **DO** ensure that the establishment is clean and well organised
- **DO** try not to set too many rules and explain those that are necessary. You may need to explain why the smoking restrictions are important, for example.
- **DO** address the whole group rather than an individual.
- **DO** provide an interpreter for a group of older visitors as their English may be limited.

Did you know?

In Saint Petersburg alone, there are 221 museums, 2,000 libraries, over 80 theatres, 45 galleries and 62 cinemas.

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A Land of Contrasts
Russia is by far the largest country in the world, extending over 11 time zones. It’s almost as big as the USA and China combined. Russia’s economy is booming, with strong growth in science and computer technology, as well as a wealth of natural resources.

Nearly 80% of the population are ethnic Russians. There are another 160 ethnic groups living throughout the country, making it one of the most diverse nations in the world. Currently, there are about 200,000 Russians living in the UK.

Where to go next
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Key Facts
- Population – approx 142,000,000
- Capital City – Moscow
- Language – Russian, ca. 100 regional languages
- Religions – Russian Orthodox 63%, Muslims 6%, others including Buddhism and Judaism <1% each
- Currency – Rouble
- Exchange Rate – 50 roubles = £1.00
- Dialling Code – +7
- Time Difference – GMT+3 (Moscow), GMT +2 to +12 countrywide

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Welcome

A range of greetings are acceptable for Spanish people, depending on familiarity. When welcoming someone from Spain for the first time, you might expect to shake hands. They may also put their left hand on your right arm to emphasise the sincerity of their greeting. Spanish men may embrace when meeting and women will exchange kisses, both with other women and men. It is good manners to give them time and space to greet each other. Many Spanish people will stand quite close together, but try not to move away, even if you find the distance uncomfortable, as this may cause offence.

In conversation, it is polite to use a title followed by their surname, but be aware that Spanish surnames work differently to British surnames. Greet Juan Benitez Sanchez as Mr Benitez. His full name includes both parents’ first surnames; he is the son of his father Señor Benitez Ramirez and his mother Señora Sanchez Lopez.

The Language

**Hello**
- O-lah
- Hola

**Goodbye**
- A-dee-yoss
- Adiós

**Please**
- Por fa-vor
- Por favor

**Thank you**
- Gra-thee-yas
- Gracias

Since Spain joined the European Union in 1986, there has been an increase in the number of young people learning to speak English, although older Spaniards and those who do not live in Spanish tourist areas are still less likely to speak English.

Castilian Spanish is the official national language of Spain, though several regional languages are also recognised and widely used. Spanish is also spoken in many countries in Central and South America but with a different accent that does not include the ‘th’ sound (in mainland Spain, the ‘c’ in a word like ‘gracias’ is pronounced as ‘th’; in Central and South America, the ‘c’ is pronounced as an ‘s’).
The Culture

There is a strong national pride that comes from the history of their Empire as well as modern events such as the restoration of their monarchy. The influence of Spain remains strong throughout Central America and most of South America, where nearly 400 million people speak Spanish as their first language. They are particularly proud of the fact that, in the space of one generation, they have become a strong economic power within Europe.

Spending quality time with the family and lifelong friends is a very important part of daily social life.

Customer Service Advice

The Spanish like things to be well presented and will feel comfortable in a welcoming, attractive shop or restaurant, expecting a polite greeting on arrival.

The Spanish attitude towards time is much more relaxed than in the United Kingdom. *Mañana*, which means tomorrow, describes a Spanish tendency not to rush things and punctuality may not always be considered as important.

If you are in a group of Spanish people, it may seem to you that they are all speaking loudly at once. This is not unusual or rude, but is a sign that they are interested in what is being said. Hand gestures are often used to emphasise words and emotions.

- **DO** avoid any direct confrontation in public.
- **DO** try to have menus translated into Spanish and be ready to explain food choices that may be different to those normally found in Spain.
- **DO** remember that dinner (with all the family) is taken very late in Spain, sometimes as late as 11pm.
Spain

Viva España

The Spanish have a long history of exploration and meeting people from other cultures. The Spanish Empire, which once covered most of the Americas and parts of the Mediterranean, North and coastal parts of Africa and the Philippines, is an important part of the country’s history.

Spain has 17 Communities or regions, which include the Canary and Balearic Islands. Spain also owns Ceuta and Melilla on the North African coast.

Around 11% of Spanish residents originate from other countries, many coming from Latin America or Africa. Spain has been among Europe’s most popular tourist destinations for decades, so it is perhaps not surprising that about 400,000 people from the UK now live there, as do many Germans, Dutch and Scandinavians.

Key Facts

- Population – approx 45,200,000
- Capital City – Madrid
- Language – Castilian Spanish (72%) as well as regional official languages Catalan, Basque, Galician and Aranese
- Religions – Catholics 94%, Muslims 2.5%, others <1%
- Currency – Euro
- Exchange Rate – €1.34 = £1.00
- Dialling Code – +34
- Time Difference – GMT+1

Where to go next

For more information about welcoming international visitors to London, visit www.rln-london.com/welcoming

RLN London’s Service Finder can help you find language and cultural services – including translation, detailed cultural briefing and language training. www.rln-london.com/servicefinder

Remember!

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Welcome

Americans expect to be greeted immediately and in a friendly, welcoming manner. When meeting someone they don’t know, Americans will shake their hand. Hugs and kisses are more common when they see their friends or family. Sometimes men will also slap each other on the back.

When introduced, Americans will very quickly use your first name, even with someone they have just met. They might even shorten it without asking, so Michael might become Mike, or Susan would be called Sue. If using titles, many women prefer to use Ms. rather than Miss or Mrs.

Coming from such a large and diverse country, they may find the United Kingdom relatively small and ‘quaint’. Americans tend to appreciate the United Kingdom’s traditions and long history, although they are likely to refer to all of the United Kingdom as England. Many Americans admire British Royalty, so you might be asked questions about the Royal Family.

The UK welcomes more visitors from the USA than any other country. Most first-time visitors will try to do a lot, preferably in groups, even if they are only visiting for a short time.

The Language

Even though Americans speak English, their accents vary and may differ quite a lot from those of most British people; they may be hard to understand if you are used to British English.

They also tend to use different words and expressions, so don’t be afraid to ask them to clarify if something they say doesn’t make sense. They will not be very familiar with British slang and may struggle to understand a strong regional accent.

**American or British English?**

- bathroom = toilet, loo
- appetisers = first course
- entrée = main course
- dessert = pudding
- check = bill
- subway = underground
- faucet = tap
The Culture

Americans value the individual. They tend to be very self-reliant and take pride in their own achievements. They are motivated by a can-do attitude and are eager to get things done, even if it’s not their job. For example, it would not be unusual for an American who drops a fork in a restaurant to take a clean one from another table rather than wait for the waiter to replace it.

Americans are taught that ‘all men are created equal’ and that everyone should have the same opportunities and ambitions, whatever their background. Realising these ambitions is often described as ‘the American Dream’.

Americans are not afraid of telling you what they really think. Do not be offended if they seem blunt as this may simply be their more direct way of communicating.

Customer Service Advice

Good customer service is highly valued in America. Most Americans expect to be greeted enthusiastically, in a friendly manner and without delay. They are not keen on being kept waiting.

Americans want their individual tastes to be catered for. For example, in restaurants, it is not unusual to ask for dressing or sauce ‘on the side’ or ask for a substitution, such as rice instead of potatoes. It is also commonplace for Americans to ask for a ‘doggy bag’ that allows them to take away food that they did not finish. Most Americans eat much earlier than the British, particularly dinner which they will often eat between 5pm and 7pm. When eating out, Americans are used to leaving more than the standard UK service charge. You can usually expect to receive anything between 15-20% of the total bill.

Americans who do not come from a large city may have never used public transport before visiting the UK. They may be uncomfortable with the crowding, especially on the tube and in central London, as they are not used to sharing a confined space with others.

- **DO** give free handouts or souvenirs when possible. Americans love a bargain and will appreciate having a memory of their visit.
- **DO** help Americans find their way if they appear lost or confused.
- **DO** ask them what part of the USA they come from.
- **DO** share any positive experiences you have had in the USA.
Land of Opportunity

The United States of America is the third largest country in the world in terms of land mass, after Russia and Canada. There are 50 states in the USA which span four time zones. Its economy and military are the largest in the world.

The American economy is diversified, with an emphasis on service industries. Silicon Valley’s computer industry and Hollywood films are especially well known. New York’s Wall Street remains one of the world’s most important financial centres. Less obvious are the large numbers of small businesses, farmers and entrepreneurs.

Key Facts

- Population – approx 300,000,000
- Capital City – Washington, DC (District of Columbia)
- Language – English (82%), Spanish (10%)
- Religions – Protestants 50%, Catholics 25%, Jews 2%, others <1%, agnostics 14%
- Currency – US Dollar
- Exchange Rate – US$2 = £1.00
- Dialling Code – +1
- Time Difference – GMT-5 to GMT -8 (US mainland)

Where to go next

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‘Welcoming the World’ is an initiative which aims to help people in frontline roles to give great customer service to international visitors. RLN London has endeavoured to ensure the accuracy of the information contained within this country profile, which is one of a wider series. However, views or opinions presented by the contributing author do not necessarily represent those of RLN London.

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