

How to Behave Politely In 12 Countries

When you travel abroad, you always want to mind your manners. Here's an easy guide to behaving brilliantly around the world.

Norway

Remember how careful you were during your driver's license test? Good. Hold the wheel as if your driving instructor is still sitting next to you. Drive passively and don't honk unless you absolutely have to.

Russia

Don't smile unless you mean it. To some Russians, a polite smile to a passing stranger or a store clerk is rude and meaningless. Don't be a phony!

Japan

Avoid disagreeing in public and watch your grammar. Politeness is such a big deal in Japan that there are different grammar rules for expressing degrees of politeness.

Italy

Whenever you receive a present, unleash your inner child and tear it open right away. Leaving gifts unopened is an insult. Of course, if you're going to give them flowers in return, avoid chrysanthemums—they're for funerals only.

France

When you're stuck in the elevator with a stranger, don't start a staring contest with the door. Make small talk. Actually, try making small talk with anyone you run into—especially shop owners. (It could land you a free baguette!)

Germany

When you visit a beer hall, it's okay to grab a seat at a table with strangers. Just don't sit anywhere marked with the word "Stammtisch." That's where a regular sits.

Argentina

Hankering for some gum or a cigarette? Make sure you've got enough for everybody in the room—you're expected to share.

Chile

Forget what your mother told you about staring. Go ahead and look all you want—attracting a wandering eye is considered flattering. Catcalls are common, too, but they're becoming less welcome. Use at your own risk.

Colombia

If you're having dinner with friends, don't pack up when the plates are taken away. You're expected to stick around a little longer. The tip is also included in the bill, but you don't need to pay it.

Croatia

Avoid raising your thumb, index, and middle fingers all at once—you'll be mistaken for a Serbian nationalist. And when you're talking to someone, don't beat around the bush. Get to the point!

Iceland

Almost all the cafes in Iceland are mom-and-pop shops with nary a chain store in sight. So don't drink your mocha latte on the go; it's supposed to be savored inside.

Mongolia

If something is "so-so," it's perfectly acceptable to give someone the middle finger. (Now that's a sentence you don't read often!)