
THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY: (cont'd)

In general, Arabs place a great deal of importance on family and the family responsibilities will always take precedence over any business affairs.

These brief sections on Islam and the Family are offered simply as background and to provide information that may help avoid potential embarrassment to both the Western businessman and your Arab host.

SOCIAL & BUSINESS NORMS:

An important element to gaining the ease and confidence to function effectively in the region is in understanding usual social and business norms.

On the social side Western businessmen will find the Arab people to be very hospitable. Very often your Arab associates will invite you to their homes for a dinner.

These events are usually conducted after the last prayer of the evening therefore, can start quite late in the evening. Often a large group will be present and may consist of other Western businessmen, other Arab businessmen and senior associates of your host. The evening is a men only affair and is usually held in the majlis room at your hosts home. Dinner will usually be prepared by the hosts family or servants and will be served by male members of the family or the expatriate servants. The pre-dinner period is typically a time for the telling of stories or humorous incidents, business dealings, and a general getting to know each other. Oftentimes, the typical Arab hors d'oeuvres of dates and Arabic coffee are served. Sometimes alcohol may also be served. It is prudent not to accept alcoholic beverages unless your host also partakes.

The dinner will be sumptuous by Western standards and the guests are expected to try a little of everything. Do not be surprised if there is a great deal of food left over; this will be consumed by the servants and remainder of the family. Upon the completion of the meal Arabic sweet tea will be served and quite quickly thereafter the party is expected to break up.

All of the well known protocol like eating with the right hand; not showing the sole of the foot; etc. should be observed. Although strange to the newcomer these evening dinners with your Arab friends and associates can be very enjoyable and quite a lot of fun.