
Cultural and Business Tips for Canadians Doing Business in India

An appreciation for a country's cultural and business practices can be beneficial to the business executive approaching the market for the first time. This is especially true for a country such as India which, for many entrepreneurs, remains a market both mysterious and exotic. Following are some observations worthy of note.

- **Names** often indicate whether a person is Hindu, Muslim or Sikh. Address people by their given names only if requested to do so. Professional titles (Doctor, Professor) are used, when appropriate. *Shri* is the title used along with the last name for men, *Shreemati* for married women and *Kumari* for single women
- **Greetings** between most Indians are with the "namaste" gesture (bending gently with palms kept together below the chin) and rarely with a handshake. Indian men and very westernised women may offer to shake hands with foreigners, but a Western woman should not initiate a handshake with an Indian man; instead, she should wait for him to offer one; if he does not, she should nod and smile. Guests may be adorned with a garland of flowers which should be immediately removed and carried in the right hand as a gesture of humility.
- **Business negotiations** require time and patience. Impromptu business meetings are common. Plan on several visits before a decision is reached.
- **Communications** by most Indians, particularly where "yes" and "no" answers are expected, are usually vague. "No" may be expressed by saying "I'll try." A smile or head jerk may indicate "yes" but can also mean "I don't know."
- **Business relationships** in India are highly personal. Indians are very interested in the family life and values of a potential partner. Invitations to visit the home of an Indian colleague are common and are an essential step in building rapport.
- **Dinner invitations** and home visits frequently are extended to visiting business people. Unless hosts are wearing footwear, guests at a meal in a private home should remove their shoes before entering. Bringing gifts of chocolate, Indian sweets or flowers for the host is appropriate. Do not wrap presents in white or black; such colours are considered unlucky. If offered refreshments of tea, coffee, fruit or sweets, it is polite for a guest to initially refuse the offer but to eventually accept. If utensils are not present at a meal, be sure to use the right hand for eating and for passing and receiving objects.