

III. Eating Out

When going to a restaurant with Pakistanis, be aware that it is impossible to split the bill, even between men. The concept of 'going Dutch' outrages a Pakistani's sense of hospitality. They will nearly always offer to pay, so unless this is what you want, it is best to clarify in advance your position as a host. Normally, if you are a newcomer, a Pakistani will wish to treat you. If this is the case, it would be courteous to accept graciously and reciprocate sometime later.

IV. Conversation

Pakistanis are intensely proud of their nationality, their ethnicity, and their religion. Unless you feel very sure of your relationship with someone, it would be wise to avoid talking about Islam, Kashmir and relations with India, Israel and sex.

If you do speak of Islam, do so with only the greatest respect. If you are not religious, do not talk about it. In the history of Islam there has always been respect for Judaism and Christianity, but the concept of atheism is offensive.

Men should not inquire about a man's wife or grown daughters, asking for instance, their names or what they do. If a Pakistani asks you these questions you may then inquire, but otherwise refrain from this topic. You may always ask, in a general way, about the health and happiness of his children and once you know a Pakistani, he will always inquire politely about your family.

People on the other hand, may ask you surprising questions, such as "What do you earn?" or "How much does your house cost?". Be ready with a pleasant and inoffensive answer if you do not wish to divulge such information!

Most important of all, foreigners should remember that all Pakistanis, regardless of education or Western appearance, are fiercely proud of their heritage. Even those who speak only English, do not say their prayers or fast, who drink alcohol and are openly critical of their society have an inherent pride in their religion and culture. Do not underestimate this sense of loyalty and patriotism, as it is likely to surface strongly at criticism from an outsider.

V. Body Language

Keep in mind that public displays of affection, even by foreigners, should be avoided at all times. Men and women never touch in public in Pakistan. Women should be careful not to give men the least encouragement, however unintentional that may be. A smile or light touch on the arm might easily be misconstrued.

Men shake hands, but handshaking between men and women is not the practice though Pakistani men and women who have experience with foreigners will often extend their hand. The best rule is to nod your head and verbalize your greetings, extending your hand only after the other person does. If you forget, do not be offended if your outstretched hand is ignored.

Feet should be tucked under if a person is sitting on the ground, especially when visiting in a village. It is considered rude to show the soles of your feet and allowing the sole of your foot to point towards a person across the room may be considered offensive.