

Did you know that the victory sign is an obscene gesture in Britain if done palm-inward? ... that bargaining over the price of an item is common in Bolivia but not in Chile? ... that pouring soy sauce on rice is a no-no in Japan, waiting your turn matters in Spain (but not in Italy), and proposing to Go Dutch (split the bill) in China can be taken as a big insult?

"Is such knowledge relevant?", you may ask. "Usually, of course," the author of *Going Dutch in Beijing* admits, "the locals will make generous allowances for outsiders. ... But it's surely better to be aware of the pitfalls than not." And, one might add, while cultural faux-pas are luckily often forgiven, they sometimes do make the difference between success and failure, between entering into a long, prospering business relationship and altogether losing the deal.



Aptly subtitled *The International Guide to Doing the Right Thing*, this book aims to sensitize readers to numerous cultural norms and practices found around the world, as well as to the consequences of violating such norms. Seventeen short chapters cover aspects as diverse as greetings and naming conventions, toasting and conducting meetings, relating to the other sex and going to funerals. The information pro-

vided ranges from the useful (for instance, in which parts of the world it would be rude not to stand when greeting someone) to the exotic (holding out the palm of your hand towards someone can be deeply insulting in Greece) and the outright bizarre (knowing that the *Kiasuburger*, offered by McDonalds in Singapore, received its name from the Hokkien word *kiasu*, which means 'afraid to be inferior,' might not really boost your status as a globally competent traveler all that much, I am afraid).

Along the way, though, McCrum conveys an important and often forgotten message: that the basic concept of bridging value and style differences requires knowing at least a little about the other and continually demonstrating respect for local customs, traditions, and beliefs.

Compared to another popular work covering global etiquette rules, Terri Morrison and Wayne Conaway's *Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands*, Mark McCrum offers a far less systematic approach, which is the biggest downside to this book: don't expect to find a handy set of guidelines for any particular country here. What you get instead, and what still makes *Going Dutch in Beijing* worth a recommendation, is light reading you'll find amusing and entertaining, with lots of anecdotes and at times profound insights into this strange, endearing world in which we live.

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