The Global Etiquette Guide to Africa and the Middle East

Everything You Need to Know for Business and Travel Success

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Preface

The idea for this series emerged out of the work that my staff and I, and literally thousands of people from around the world that we work with, have been doing for almost two decades: assisting businesspeople and travelers to better understand their colleagues in other cultures. This work has primarily focused on international business and has taken many forms: helping to prepare families of employees adjust to an overseas assignment; assisting individual businesspeople in their negotiations with colleagues abroad; and helping global organizations to build more effective global teams. As business has globalized, the need for cross-cultural information has grown.

But globalization hasn’t affected only the businessperson. While most of the work in the cross-cultural field has developed in response to international business needs, the need for cross-cultural information for the nonbusiness international traveler (both actual and of the armchair variety!) has also grown. Unfortunately, the amount of useful, objective, and applicable information, adapted to the needs of the more casual international explorer, has been limited. In most cases, what information was available usually took the form of anecdotal war stories, overgeneralized stereotypes (always interesting, but of dubious veracity), or theoretical statements about culture that were too removed from the day-to-day adventures of the international traveler. As the gap between useful cultural information for international business and international travelers grew, so did the need to bridge it. Hence, the idea for the Global Etiquette Guide series.

Correction: I embarked on this project at first with the goal of writing one book. But the world, as it turned out, was simply too big, and so was the book. Given my work, I for one should not have been surprised at this development, but at first was concerned about how to handle the dilemma. Nevertheless, under the kind and careful guidance of my editor, publisher, and agent, we expanded the original concept into a series. And I am glad we did. For one thing, it gave me the breathing room to explore cultures to the degree that was necessary for the reader; for another, it gave me the opportunity to experience just how fine a team I was working with.

My editor, Tom Miller, did double duty, providing patience and insight, through both the serialization of the original book and the actual editorial review of the material. His input, despite my occasional and incorrect misgivings, gave me focus, pause to rethink when it was important to do so, and perhaps most importantly, impetus and space to keep going in the face of demanding schedules and unpredictable events. A good editor provides the professional
expertise to fine-tune the work. A great editor also provides faith. Tom never failed to offer both.

Jane Dystel is everything an author can ask for in an agent. On many levels, this series would not have happened without her. She is always available, always on my side, and equally able to manage scrupulously the details of a particular project while helping me to put the pieces in place for the bigger career; I am very grateful to have her support. This is the third time we have worked together on a project, and I look forward to many more.

Bob Stein is the lawyer behind the scenes. Lawyers are, no doubt, overlooked far too often, and easily forgotten once their job is done. Here I have probably been more neglectful than most, for Bob is also a dear and longtime friend who has never failed to support me, even in my most ridiculous moments, and I fear I have taken advantage of that. Forgive me, Bob, and thank you . . . again.

I also want to thank all the professionals in the cross-cultural field with whom I have had the pleasure to work over the years. They have all contributed in important ways to these books. To my colleagues at Berlitz International and at GMAC Intercultural, who, around the world, have given me opportunities to play a leading role in the cross-cultural field, I am eternally grateful. To the many professionals in both competing and supporting organizations whom I have learned from, and worked and played with, many, many thanks. Finally, to the diverse thousands of individuals around the globe, of all cultures and backgrounds, who, in their work with me and my staff, have provided us with the joy and opportunity to learn about their unique part of the world, my very heartfelt thanks. Without your perspectives, experiences, and input, my work, and ultimately these books, would never have been possible.

When exploring cultural differences, one quickly observes that there are some cultures that “work to live,” and others that “live to work.” Balancing these two perspectives is a constant challenge for both cultures and individuals, and my world would surely be quite unbalanced without the love and support of my wife, Sheryl. She has been my constant, both the wind beneath my wings and my tether to the shore. I know this has not been easy, as she must also balance her own professional demands with our personal life. That she has done both is a testament to her strength and love. These books, as with so much else in my life, could not have occurred without her.

Leah, my daughter, plays a great role in these books. As I’ve watched her grow into the intelligent and caring young woman she is today, she serves as a constant reminder that the prize we work so hard for should truly be worth something. It needs to be created in love, based on justice, and worth the struggle. As I hope I have given meaning to her life, she continues to give meaning to mine. We have been growing up together all her life, and although she is now “all grown up,” I have no intention of stopping.

Finally, after crediting all these worthy folks for their kind and important contributions, I must now credit myself: all the shortcomings of these books are mine. If I overstated a culture too broadly, overlooked an important cultural consideration, or in any way misrepresented or misjudged a particular way of life, the error is mine and no one else’s. I only ask that the reader please consider the cause as the “anthropologist’s dilemma”: that is, the impossibility of describing a culture objectively, due to the fact that the “describer” is always viewing the culture being observed in reference to his or her own (in my case,
the United States). For some, this unfortunate natural law of the social sciences may be an added bonus (for other Americans, perhaps). For others, this may cause some serious and legitimate misgivings. I hear you both. Please take solace in the fact that every effort has been made to minimize the negative effects of this phenomenon whenever and wherever possible. No doubt I have not succeeded completely.