

# Etiquette 101: Hand Gestures

Whether in travel or politics, we're encouraged to be as communicative as possible. Yet body language—and common hand gestures in particular—routinely sow confusion in everything from the simplest tourist transactions to moments of great import. Was Churchill flipping off his electorate when he gave them the British V-sign? (No.) Are Iraqis cheering on American troops when they give the thumbs-up—or actually saying up yours, as the gesture traditionally communicates in Iraq? (Probably.) Wars have been started over less. This primer might help you avoid your own international incidents—and open a window onto cultures that no phrase book ever could.

## HOW WE SAY IT

## WHERE IT'S NOT OKAY

## WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

HELLO/GOOD-BYE



Wave the full arm side to side.

In **East Asian** countries, it's considered overly demonstrative—and can also be confused in **Japan**, **Europe**, and **Latin America** for no, and in **India** for "Come here."



In northern **Europe**, wag your hand back and forth from the wrist.



In **Greece** and **Italy**, the palm faces inward, fingers curled in. Don't mistake this for a beckoning motion.



In **Japan**, bow slightly. In **India** and other **Buddhist/Hindu** areas, place your hands together and say "Namaste."

STOP/EXCUSE ME



Hand and arm out in front, fingers outspread.

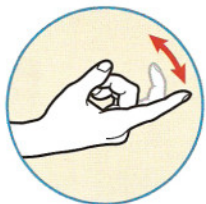
In **Lebanon**, it simply means no. In **Greece**, it's an awful curse called the moutza (made worse by using both hands and pushing the palms forward), and it has similarly rude meanings in **Spain**, **Nigeria**, and **Chile**.



In **Greece**, just avoid putting your hand out with fingers outstretched, no matter what the intention. Count and beckon with the palm facing inward or downward.

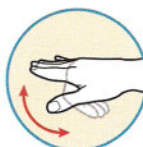
⊕ The **Japanese** excuse themselves when pushing through a crowd by holding the hand up in a chopping motion; this is not considered rude.

COME HERE

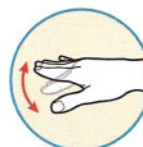


Either curl the index finger, or four fingers, toward you.

In the **Philippines** and other parts of **East Asia**, the index finger is used only to beckon dogs. In **Latin American** countries, it's a come-on, and in **Indonesia** and **Australia**, it's for soliciting prostitutes. In **southern Europe**, the all-finger version would be mistaken for good-bye.

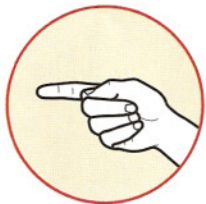


In most of **Asia** (including **India**) and parts of **Latin America**, the palm faces downward and the fingers are curled below in tandem in a scratching motion.



In **Korea**, hold your arm out and move your fingers up and down, as if signaling good-bye in **Europe**.

THAT GUY OVER THERE

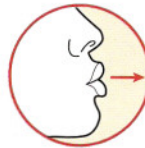


Generally, we use the index finger to indicate something or someone.

In parts of **Africa**, the index finger is pointed only at inanimate objects. In **Europe**, pointing is not particularly polite; in **China**, **Japan**, **Latin America**, and **Indonesia**, it has very rude connotations.



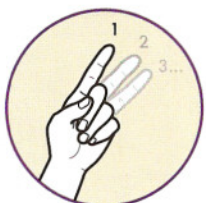
In **Indonesia**, you can use your thumb (never use the index finger, even to make a point).



In some **Latin American** countries, it's okay to purse your lips (or even pucker a kiss) in the direction of the person.

⊕ There's a range of what's acceptable: In **Zambia**, you can point to objects; in **France**, it's best to point discreetly; in **Japan**, a speaker indicating himself will point to his nose.

COUNTING 1, 2, 3...



Start with the index finger, move toward the pinkie.

**Germany** and **Austria**, where a forefinger held up could mean two instead of one. In **Japan**, the thumb alone means five. In **Greece**, the gesture for five or ten can be mistaken for a moutza.



In **Germany** and **Austria**, start with the thumb. Indicate "one" with the thumb, "two" by pointing an imaginary gun.



In **Singapore** and **Malaysia**, a yapping or quacking hand motion means five, or five followed by any number of zeroes.

⊕ The **Chinese** count to ten on one hand—which is not for amateurs. In **Indonesia**, they start with the middle finger—but be careful with that one.