

## THE ARAB GUEST

The Arab travel mentality can vary greatly as the Arabian region stretches over a vast area encompassing 22 countries from Mauritania in the west to Yemen in the east. As the majority of Arab guests are from the United Arab Emirates (UAE), consisting of Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Kuwait, the advice given here pertains mainly to this important region.

The above-named states have in common rapid economic growth due to the large oil and gas reserves. These states have been catapulted from a tribal life to relative wealth, although Dubai has always held a significant role as a trade centre in the Middle East.

Tourism in the UAE is booming, and luxuries, the newest technologies and excellent service have become the norm. No wonder then that the most expensive and luxurious hotel in the world, the Burj al Arab, is in Dubai.

Apart from expecting exclusively furnished hotels, Arab guests also expect respect and tolerance for their lifestyle.

To the majority of Arabs, Islamic rules are the foundation of daily life.

Courteous and attentive service is a prerequisite.

### 1. Tolerance and Sensitivity

*Personal recommendations* and networking between Arab families are of the utmost importance and recommendations by acquaintances are given more heed than extravagant advertising brochures. The chance of winning over the Arab market through a few families is therefore very high, but at the same time, a single 'mishap' by an employee can ruin the reputation of an entire hotel.

*Family consciousness* is highly regarded in the Arab region. Unlike in the West, the family is the basic social unit, not the individual. In Arab society the weak are respected and protected, and the elderly are always afforded special respect.

Arabs behave in a reserved manner towards Europeans and react very sensitively to a lack of respect and intolerance. To avoid such conflicts, sensitivity and empathy are of great importance.

### 2. Travel

The majority of Arabs travel with their entire families. Individual tourists and business travellers are still in the minority, although this is slowly changing. Only male travellers will travel alone.

Arab travellers are normally well-to-do. They are used to being looked after and often buy themselves certain freedoms using their substantial economic means. Despite their buying power, however, prices are no longer simply paid; comparisons are made, especially when it comes to hotel accommodation. To do this they are using the internet more and more.

The main reasons for travel are business trips, visits to conferences and exhibitions and medical visits. Medical trips are most often undertaken by guests from the UAE as their medical schemes pay for hospital stays, drinks (non-alcoholic) and laundry. Medical checks are often combined with family holidays.

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Another reason for travel is to escape the summer heat and for the sake of children, who are highly regarded, with many trips being undertaken purely for their sake and to visit theme parks and shop for toys.

### **3. Travel Structure and Duration**

The main travel season is between June and September. Family groups can number up to 60 people during this time. Depending on the rank of the Arab, nannies, secretaries and drivers are often part of the entourage, which makes it difficult to establish an average group size. Ten people per family are an approximate starting point. The duration of trips varies from case to case, but is generally several weeks.

### **4. Holiday Mentality**

It is not the norm in Arab states to have to ask for service, nor to thank for services received. Excellent service is expected and a given. Most Arab guests are highly educated and well travelled. They are therefore often seen as demanding. Flexibility and tolerance of their special requests is therefore a must. For example, Arab guests will expect the restaurant times to be adjusted to their daily routine or for room service and room cleaning services to be individually scheduled.

Taking time to develop personal relationships between the hosts and the guests is much appreciated. Business and personal relationships are not strictly separated. The Arab guest prefers a designated contact partner that ensures his wishes and interests are looked after, and that keeps up intense communication. These contacts do not necessarily need to be able to speak Arabic. Often this is even seen as a benefit, as it protects their privacy if the contact cannot understand everything discussed. It is not unusual for the younger generation to be fluent in English. Guests from North Africa generally speak French as their second language.

Arab women completely covered in black robes are still an oddity to most Europeans. However, the social standing of women ranges between 'strictly Muslim' and 'emancipated'. The rules laid out in the Koran guarantee her that she will be looked after her entire life. In return, she must acknowledge the man's authority in society, the family and in marriage. The wearing of veils was long seen as a sign of high social prestige. Only women of high standing were allowed to wear them; slaves and dancers were forbidden to do this, under threat of punishment. Today the veil signifies a close affinity to Islam and is a sign of the honorable life of the wearer. Advances by men are not tolerated.

Hoteliers must be prepared for the lobby area to occasionally look like a bazaar. In an effort to strengthen their relationships Arab guests will meet there, drink tea, smoke – and if permitted also their hubbly bubbly.

### **5. Information and Booking Behaviour**

Prior to travel the normal booking procedures (internet, advertising, travel agents and agents specialising in medical trips) are checked for prices, availability and décor, special services etc. For guests travelling for medical reasons, local embassies and consulates often take care of these issues. Close contacts with these are therefore of benefit.

Often guests book hotels only to then compare offers and prices with other hotels once in the country. Should the hotel booked not live up to their standards and expectations, they

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will relocate. Reception staff can play a decisive role in this decision. Although low prices and rebates are important, negotiations seldom take place.

Representatives of a group are often sent ahead. More often than not however these days, guests arrive without having booked at all. Because guests are not under any time constraints, the departure date is often left open. This fact should always be taken into account and dealt with flexibly.

When bookings are made, babies up to three years old are not mentioned as they are not seen as children. This often leads to confusion on check-in. A point should therefore be made to specifically ask about babies accompanying the group. When a booking is made, the hierarchy (family, drivers, nannies etc), who will be footing the bill, as well as the individual family members' names must be established. For long stays, the billing should be clarified at the start, especially when guests are travelling for medical reasons. The health department of the country of origin often covers the accommodation, F&B and laundry.

Bookings are often made using the prefix 'El' or 'Al', a type of royal title, which however is left off on arrival or when telephoning. This often leads to irritations and misunderstandings, which is why this fact should be remembered from the outset.

It is also recommended that families from various regions are separated from one another. A good option is to inform guests of the Arabic origins of the other guests. Rooms should always be in quiet areas where no lingering smells are present.

There are also often requests for rooms with connecting doors. Should this request not be made, family rooms should be situated close to one another on the same floor.

## **6. Travel Content**

The main interests are sight-seeing, casino visits and outings with/for children. Shopping is also very popular, which is why hotels should always have shopping tips at hand. Addresses for oversized clothing should also be included.

Apart from shopping, excursions into nature, especially the mountains and such, are enjoyed. Sports events are also favourite pastimes; this includes soccer, which is becoming increasingly popular, horseracing, golf and motor racing.

## **7. Communication**

Because the majority of Arab guests are able to speak English well, communication problems are rare. Should the older members of a group not be fluent in English, the younger ones do the translating. Children often speak English astonishingly well.

When it comes to negotiations or relationship building, Arabs use very descriptive language combined with many gestures. Instead of coming to the point they use long-winded descriptions. So as not to come across as disrespectful or uninterested, it is advisable to take time and to adapt one's way of expression as much as possible.

It is most important not to decline a guest's request too bluntly. This ensures that neither party loses face. The wording: 'I will try my best' or suggesting an alternative to the request are often very helpful. But under no circumstances should a promise be made that cannot be kept.

Honesty is a virtue: this saying is interpreted very differently in various countries. Because Arabs are so relationship orientated and take heed of harmonies and friendships, it is still considered being honest when unpleasant subjects are simply ignored and positives stressed. Arabs will always be able to 'fish out' the truth in a conversation.

In contrast to Europeans, Arabs find it insulting to ignore people that walk into a conversation. Making them wait or even ignoring them must be avoided at all costs, even if one just politely acknowledges the guest and advises him that he will be attended to shortly.

Interpersonal relationships have a much higher priority than does time-keeping. This is why Arab guests cannot understand it when no time is taken to have an in-depth discussion. Even unimportant subjects offer the opportunity to build trust and understanding. Therefore, when under time constraints, rather tactfully and reassuringly promise the guest a chat at a later stage.

Arabs always expect first-class service/performance, and requests therefore often come across as being demanding. Diplomacy and tolerance are therefore advisable. In addition, absolute punctuality and dependability are expected from the hotel. It is advisable to regularly question the guest on his/her satisfaction. Should there at any time be a problem, e.g. the behaviour of children, this must be addressed privately, with the group's representative. Under no circumstances should the head of the party be confronted or called.

## 7.1 Topics of Conversation

A sure way to win the affection and loyalty of an Arab guest is the enquiry into the wellbeing of his family, especially that of the male members. Enquiries about the female members could be misconstrued and are to be avoided. It would be of great benefit to the hotel contact person to have background information on the family ties of guests. It is therefore vital to keep a guest file containing all the relevant up-to-date details.

Topics to be avoided are religion and politics, although being knowledgeable about Islamic religion is a sign of respect. This should however not be shown off. The local customs and way of life are interesting topics and offer much to talk about.

Most Arabs are pleased by declarations of friendship. In addition, substantiated acknowledgment of their technical advances, art and social security systems helps to reduce feelings of mistrust and is generally appreciated. They also value acknowledgements for the cultural achievements in their respective countries. Positive comments on the high standard of tourism in the Gulf States are also appreciated.

Humour is a very difficult thing to transfer across cultural lines and should be used cautiously. Translations of amusing sayings often lose their amusement value and are not easily understood. Sarcasm and irony are to be avoided unless one knows the other person very well.

## 7.2 Non-verbal Communication

To begin with some Arab guests may come across as being reserved and sometimes even uninterested. Countering this with a smile helps make the guest feel respected and welcome. Ignoring a guest is interpreted as an insult. As an Arab saying goes: "Kill me, but don't give me a funny look!"

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Arab women will generally avoid any eye contact with male staff. Eye contact between women however is not an issue. A male staff member should therefore avoid eye contact with a female guest and should never try to force it. Should a woman ask a question, the male companion is addressed unless the woman actively seeks eye contact. Between men, however, direct and intense eye contact is highly regarded.

Arabs generally have smaller personal comfort zones than Europeans. During conversations it is customary to feel the speaker's breath. Europeans who keep their normal personal distance could therefore evoke the feeling that their presence is felt as repulsive. Pointing fingers at persons is also seen as very impolite. Should one be unsure about how to behave when dealing with Arab guests, the best advice is to rather be too reserved rather than forceful.

### 7.3 Guest Complaints

As with all guests, voicing of complaints depends very much on the personality of the person. Should complaints arise these are brought up by the family's spokesperson (interpreter), rather than the head of the family or his wife. It is therefore important to establish a good relationship, based on trust, with the spokesperson.

The spokesperson should also be given a few names of people in authority, who are able to make quick decisions that are followed through. This has the benefit that instead of discussing problems with other guests/families, the spokesperson can approach the hotel directly to sort matters out. This is also important as families stay for long periods and tend to develop contacts with other families. Through direct communication the escalation of a problem can therefore be avoided.

Even though women are taking up more and more managerial roles, experience shows that Arab guests still prefer addressing complaints with male employees. Even if a guest becomes loud and angry, it is important to stay calm. A good tactic is to remove the guest from the public area and discuss the matter over a cup of tea.

Complaints are always to be seen as a chance to improve service.

## 8. HOTEL

### 8.1 Choice of Hotel

Luxury is not the deciding factor when it comes to choosing a hotel. A certain standard is definitely expected, but the proximity to shopping centres or supermarkets and the hotel's atmosphere are more important. Medical checks are often the reason for visits, so the proximity to clinics can be a deciding factor in such a case. Should the hotel not be ideally situated, a limousine service could be considered. Instead of city hotels, smaller, family hotels are becoming more and more popular. As friendliness is a deciding factor, hotels with a family atmosphere are preferred.

### 8.2 Greeting and Check-In

The greeting is the first, all-important impression a guest gets. On arrival guests want to feel welcomed and respected. An Arab saying goes: "A look can kill quicker than a sword!" To counter this, a smile or even an Arab greeting can make a big difference. Even though

direct communication might not be possible, the effort is seen as a friendly gesture, which in turn will leave a positive memory.

Greetings are so important in Arab society that they have taken on an almost ritualistic character. Even when staff are under pressure, they should always stay calm and take their time with this greeting ceremony. Arab men should be respectfully approached, and then one should await their response. Some greet by shaking hands, others do not. Most Arabs however find handshaking strange, and should it take place, only the right hand is to be offered, as the left is considered 'unclean'. Arab men greet each other in a variety of ways, either with their noses, their shoulders or by hand. Well-known acquaintances of the same gender also exchange three kisses on the cheeks. It is customary to greet the highest-ranking person first. Ladies are usually not greeted by hand; a greeting is merely implied (hinted at).

European women may offer their hand in greeting. When it comes to money, however, this should be dealt with by a male. Especially the older Arab generations find it difficult to deal with female staff.

Reception should always have the times for sunrise and sunset handy, as these are important for prayer times. Times can be requested from the local mosques. Prayers are said five times a day, facing the direction of Mecca. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the guest knows where Mecca lies. To assist with this, stickers can be put on the windowsills advising the direction of Mecca. Some hotels even offer compasses or instruct their staff accordingly.

The addresses of embassies and Arabic-speaking doctors should also be at hand and are regularly asked for. These can be given with the welcome letter.

Further information that is often requested is recommendations on Arabic, Persian or Lebanese restaurants, limousine rental companies or Arabic-speaking guides. For Arabs the weekend starts on Fridays, and Sundays are a normal working day.

Although Arabs generally value a calm and relaxed atmosphere, the check-in should proceed speedily. This is especially important for the women and children who have been travelling for many hours. On arrival the guest will want to inspect and choose from several rooms to ensure that they meet his expectations and those of his family members. The category booked by the organiser should however not be changed. Special wishes are often only requested on check-in. Staff should therefore be flexible. Even after several visits to a hotel the special requests may vary from visit to visit, which is why requests from previous years should be clarified before implementation.

Due to the long duration of stay, many hotels insist on weekly billing. Should this be the case, the guest must be advised of this on check-in. Financial matters must however be dealt with tactfully so as to avoid giving the impression of mistrust.

When luggage is taken to the room the porter should always leave the door open and leave the room as quickly as possible. The ladies in the party will often wait outside the room until the porter has left. To wait for a tip is seen as rude.

Arab guests tend to occupy rooms in big groups. To check the number of guests in a room it is helpful to consult with the housekeeper, as she is in charge of the daily cleaning of rooms. Guests also like to change rooms amongst themselves and the spokesperson of the group should therefore be consulted to clarify the room occupancies. Nonetheless,

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guests are usually quite cooperative should occupancy issues arise. Arabic guests often leave their room doors open or unlocked. It is therefore advised that guests should be informed in writing about the hotels liability policy in cases of theft from the rooms.

The issuing of house rules in Arabic is seen as an insult, but should this be a standard, these rules should also be laid out in English and another common language if possible. A friendly welcome letter, which politely requests the adherence to certain rules, will usually be readily accepted.

### 8.3 Hotel Interiors/Furnishings

Children occupy a very important status in Arabic countries and if possible, designated areas should be set aside for them. A playroom furnished with billiard tables, computer games etc. is a good idea. The venue should be in an area of the hotel where noise disturbance would be at a minimum and where children can play until late at night. Due to the fact that Arab children are only used to their local foods, it often happens that foods will be heated up in their hotel rooms. This can be prevented by including Arabic foods on the menu. Nannies travelling with children have a purely supervisory and chaperoning function, they are not entitled to reprimand or discipline. Should it be possible, the hotel could offer activity and entertainment programmes for the children to keep them in check. Reception should also advise the nannies of the quickest route to the nearest playground or park.

Security is an important aspect for Arabic travellers as the man carries the responsibility for the entire family. The presence of security personnel and/or cameras in the passages is positively met.

Airconditioning is an absolute must and is seen as a non-negotiable standard.

Religion being an integral part of Arab life, guests pray five times a day. A designated prayer room would therefore be appreciated. This room can be very basic, e.g. an empty conference room or guest room in which prayer mats can be spread out. Prayer mats are usually brought along, but some hotels also offer these for loan. It is also seen as polite to remove any items connected to other religions.

Arab women appreciate pool times designated for their exclusive use, with only female staff on duty, should this be required. The standard swimwear worn by ladies is leggings and t-shirts. European swimwear is seldom worn.

### 8.4 Room Furnishings

Although Arab guests are usually quite good at speaking English, signage in Arabic clarifies any uncertainties and helps to make the guest feel welcomed. The room service menu should definitely be translated and guest service directories in Arabic, as well as a welcome letter in that language, will leave a lasting impression.

Guest rooms should be as spacious as possible, as Arabs are used to having a lot of space. Big rooms, preferably suites, are expected. Should no connecting doors between rooms be available, rooms should at least be adjacent to one another. Big beds are also preferred (king and queen size), and baby cots are also often requested. Cooking facilities in rooms are also welcomed, as baby milk can be warmed and water boiled for tea. Many guests do not like ordering room service too often, and should cooking facilities not be available, at least a kettle could be offered as an alternative.

Arabic TV channels should be available; suggestions are Al-Jazeera and Nile, which are both available via satellite. Video recorders and DVD players are also an ideal service to make available. Arabic newspapers are a must, as the need for up-to-date information is high.

A welcome letter in the room which not only greets the guest but also conveys detailed information on the hotel and its services is much appreciated. Small welcome gifts such as fruit, figs, nuts, biscuits, cakes and alcohol-free chocolates are popular.

As the 'Do not disturb' sign is often left out during the day, good communication between room service and housekeeping is vital. Small gifts for children e.g. chocolate are very important.

Arab guests greatly appreciate finding big bottles of still mineral water in their rooms on arrival. These are especially enjoyed by the children after a long trip. Only still water is drunk and internationally known brands are preferred to the local ones.

It should be noted that Muslims are prohibited from drinking alcohol, but that not all Arabs are Muslims. In addition, this prohibition is treated in a more relaxed manner when in Europe. Alcohol need only be removed from rooms on request or after enquiry from the hotel or when children accompany adults. Minibars are usually cleared shortly after arrival anyway to accommodate water bottles. The stocking of the minibar can be discussed on arrival.

As appliances are often brought along, adapters and cables should be available on request.

## 8.5 Bathrooms

Arab guests will request a large number of bath towels on a daily basis. This is due to the fact that the entire body must be cleansed prior to every prayer session. A towel is never used twice, which is why the usage is so high.

In addition, it is regarded as unhygienic to only use toilet paper after visiting the toilet. Arabian custom dictates that one also uses water to clean oneself, which is done with the left hand. This is why their toilets are fitted with a water spray facility. Seeing that standard toilets are not fitted with this device, a towel is then used to clean the left hand. Naturally the towel is immediately given in to be laundered. Some adults try to adjust to the 'strange' European habit, but this can not be expected from children. Due to the unpleasant smell of these towels Arabs are often labelled as being unhygienic, which couldn't be further from the truth. Even though towels are immediately sent to be laundered, the provision of white towels is not necessarily doing them a favour. In addition, guests should also be able to make use of a laundry facility.

As children often run around barefoot, towels are laid out in the bathrooms to avoid them becoming ill due to the unfamiliar temperatures.

## 8.6 Daily Routine

Because of the high daytime temperatures in the Arab region, Arabs tend to be more active during the evening hours. Their daily routine has adjusted accordingly.

It is therefore suggested that cleaning routines for rooms are planned according to individual guests. It is also advisable to allocate more time for the cleaning of rooms than

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usual. Complaints might be received because cleaning staff, for insurance reasons, are not permitted to move items lying around in order to clean the room. The reason for the 'non-tidying' should be explained in a friendly and tactful manner.

To avoid unnecessary conflicts it is recommended that enough female cleaning staff are at hand to adhere to the strict gender segregation. It is however often difficult to get access to rooms due to the 'Do not disturb' sign being out. It is therefore advisable to inform the guests well in advance as to when cleaning is scheduled.

## **9. Eating Habits**

The provision of appropriate foods can be a potential area of conflict. Hotels often react negatively to the delivery of food from external sources, or the cooking of foods in the room. There are however several reasons for Arab guests not being able to go without their familiar foods:

The length of their stays is often much greater than that of other guests, which is why familiar tastes are missed. In addition, children accompanying adults cannot be expected to adapt. Also, the quality of many exotic fruits is not comparable to that of their home country, which is why special products are often flown in.

Not to be forgotten is the fact that the Muslim religion prescribes certain rules when it comes to food and drink, i.e. no pork or alcohol may be consumed, nor any other intoxicating substances. Meat must always be well done as the Koran prohibits the consumption of blood. Many Muslims also insist on meat having been slaughtered according to Islamic rites.

Arabic eating habits also vary greatly from those of European cultures. Although European foods are readily tried, Arabic foods are definitely preferred. If possible, Arabic, Turkish or Libyan chefs should therefore be brought in. Some hotels even allow the guests' own chefs to use the hotel kitchen.

The breakfast times stipulated in hotels often do not fit into the daily routine of Arabs, who usually take breakfast between 10h00 and noon. The foods on offer in hotels however are more than sufficient to cover the guests' needs. Great value is placed on a variety of fruits and fruit juices. Beware: Children often go to breakfast unaccompanied by parents. It is therefore vital to make it clear which cold meats/foods contain pork, to avoid children eating these forbidden foods.

Dinner is usually taken between 21h00 and 23h00 and is ordered from room service. Enough staff should therefore always be at hand. Choices should include Arabic dishes, menus should be translated and the various dishes should be numbered to avoid any miscommunication.

Should the hotel wish to limit guests from going out for meals or ordering in, it would be advisable to adjust themselves to the Arabic habits. Some hotels offer Arabic buffets in separate rooms or in a section of the restaurant. Others do not cater for the guests' needs and have an agreement allowing the guests to order in, but charge a 'corkage' fee for this privilege.

Should the guests make use of the restaurant, children should be especially well treated and served. Arabic guests go to eat not because the adults are hungry, but because the

children are hungry. Due to the fact that children are often 'neglected' in restaurants, parents prefer going to Arabic or Lebanese restaurants.

### 9.1 Etiquette during meals

Despite rumours, Arabic guests do not sit on the floor to eat. This is only done when the table is covered by brochures or is too small. There is little talking during meals, meaning that the noise disturbance is minimal.

A small amount of the main meal is always left on the plate, after which dessert and coffee is quickly consumed. It is a sign of politeness to at least try every dish, even if one is not hungry. Eating only commences once the head of the table opens the meal with the words 'Bismillah' (in the name of Allah). Everyone helps themselves, and it is an unwritten law that one eats the most from the dish directly in front of one. The host will always ensure that these are the best dishes.

After dinner, when coffee is served, only three small cups are consumed, as more would be considered impolite. One can however indicate beforehand when one has had enough, otherwise replenishment will be done without asking. The signal for this in the Middle East is to quickly wave the cup from left to right whilst holding it between your thumb and index finger.

In Europe, Arab guests eat with knives and forks. If meals are eaten by hand, only the right hand is used, as the left is considered as 'unclean'. In the Middle East meals are served with nan or pita bread, which is broken into little pieces that are then formed into a shovel using three fingers, and the food picked is up with this.

Dates are always a welcome offering, although the locally available ones are not of the same quality as the ones in the Middle East. This is why they are often flown in especially by guests. Favoured desserts are heavy and sweet, but usually quite costly as they contain ingredients such as hazelnuts, walnuts, almonds, pistachios and honey. Baklava, Swiss chocolate and glazed chestnuts are very well liked.

It is considered very rude to remove plates that are not quite empty without asking. Arab guests do not necessarily know the rule of laying the knife and fork next to one another on the plate to signal that one has finished. Permission must therefore be asked for before clearing.

### 9.2 Beverages

In Arab countries beverages are ordered during or after meals, not before. They are also used to receiving their food soon after ordering. In the Arab region guests are greeted with a beverage upon arrival, without having ordered. This is an Arab ritual and serves to create a friendly atmosphere. Ordering drinks prior to receiving food is not customary and seen as a nuisance.

Apart from mocha, there is no drink that is consumed in larger amounts than tea. Especially popular are black tea with a few sprigs of mint, but also cardamom, aniseed and jasmine are popular flavourants. Tea is an obligatory welcome drink for guests, and is drunk very sweet, and many hotels have started serving tea out of samovars in the lobby area. Some guests however may be irritated by the fact that the same person who serves them the tea also serves alcohol.

Coffee is served in small mocha cups with a lot of sugar (hulwa), half a sugar cube (madbuta) or without sugar (murra). Because the method of preparation and taste of coffee prepared by hotels differs greatly, coffee is often brought along by guests.

The water consumed is usually still water, and for cost reasons is often bought in large bottles at supermarkets. To counter this, water can be offered at special prices as part of room service. Because Muslims are prohibited from drinking alcohol, a large range of non-alcoholic drinks should be made available. Arab Christians however are permitted to consume alcohol. Apart from water, fruit juices and Coca-Cola are very popular, especially with children.

## **10. Summary of Important Tips**

### **Specifics**

- ❖ Emphasise to staff the importance of offering suggestions
- ❖ Enquire about health and satisfaction on a regular basis
- ❖ Have information about mosques and prayer times at hand
- ❖ Inform other guests that Arab guests are sharing the same floor
- ❖ Explain to staff how to offer tactful service by making use of examples
- ❖ Print hotel rules in Arabic, English and German
- ❖ Welcome letters can contain tactful requests about adherence to certain house rules
- ❖ Inform guests about hotel liability policy in writing (when doors are left open)
- ❖ Specify a contact person who is responsible for the group during the stay
- ❖ Show flexibility when it comes to breakfast and restaurant opening times
- ❖ Respect special requests when cleaning rooms
- ❖ Have information on children's activities and programmes at hand
- ❖ Show the nanny the way to the nearest park

### **Verbal Communication**

- ❖ Discuss the subject of communication between Arab guests and staff
- ❖ Never leave a guest waiting when they want to communicate
- ❖ Do not be irritated by the emotional expressions of guests
- ❖ Do not deny requests, rather offer alternatives and show that you are concerned and wanting to assist
- ❖ Communicate criticism tactfully
- ❖ Always plan enough time to ensure a trusting relationship is built up with guests
- ❖ Show personal interest
- ❖ Be careful when using humour; irony and sarcasm are no-no's

### **Non-verbal Communication**

- ❖ Stern expressions are interpreted as arrogant – always smile
- ❖ No direct eye contact between female guests and male staff
- ❖ Eye contact is important between men
- ❖ Accept minimal personal space when communicating

### **Complaint Behavior**

- ❖ Be sensitive and tactful during emotionally charged complaints
- ❖ Should guests retire/leave quietly, assume that there is a problem
- ❖ Involve the middle man/interpreter when guest or hotel complaints come up

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- ❖ Be proactive to avoid a spate of complaints
- ❖ Serious issues must be handled by male staff

### **Reservations**

- ❖ Clarify hierarchical order in advance
- ❖ Clarify exact number of guests including babies and nannies
- ❖ Internally, ensure that all names are spelt in one way
- ❖ Clarify on arrival who will be taking care of payments

### **Greeting / Welcome**

- ❖ Allocate sufficient time for the greeting/arrival
- ❖ Use Arab forms of greeting
- ❖ Discuss the importance of first impressions with staff. Despite reservations, guests will change hotels if they are not happy
- ❖ Male staff should not shake hands with female guests
- ❖ Handshakes that are too firm are to be avoided
- ❖ Never offer the left hand, as it is considered 'unclean'
- ❖ Ensure that the check-in runs smoothly and speedily
- ❖ Financial issues must be dealt with tactfully
- ❖ Plan in more time and staff to deal with special requests
- ❖ Have city information at hand in Arabic

### **Hotel Interior**

- ❖ Hotels with self-catering facilities are preferred
- ❖ Ensure that guests feel safe
- ❖ Offer play rooms/entertainment areas for children
- ❖ A/C is a must
- ❖ Be prepared that the lobby will at times resemble a bazaar

### **Room Interiors**

- ❖ Rooms should be big with interconnecting doors
- ❖ Check number of guests per room regularly
- ❖ Advise in a sensitive manner the rules for number of persons allowed per room
- ❖ Offer big beds
- ❖ Provide Arab TV channels
- ❖ Prepare friendly welcome letter
- ❖ Offer still mineral water in large bottles
- ❖ Discuss minibar contents in advance
- ❖ Indicate direction of Mecca (remove any other religious symbols/books)
- ❖ Be prepared for increased towel usage

### **Services on Offer**

- ❖ Discuss cleaning schedules with individual rooms
- ❖ Have enough cleaning staff at hand, preferably female
- ❖ Offer newspapers in home languages

## Food and Beverages

- ❖ Offer room service
- ❖ Translate menu into Arabic and number the dishes
- ❖ Be prepared for increase in room service between 21h00 and 23h00
- ❖ Have an Arabic chef prepare Arabic meals
- ❖ Alternatively, allow the guests' personal chef to use kitchen
- ❖ Order in Arab catering
- ❖ Adjust restaurant opening times to suit guests
- ❖ Serve children first and quickly
- ❖ Pork and alcohol are prohibited for Muslims

## Breakfast

- ❖ Offer normal international breakfast buffet
- ❖ Offer wide selection of fruit and fruit juices
- ❖ Indicate which cold meats contain pork

## Etiquette during Meal Times

- ❖ Always ask whether plates may be removed before doing so
- ❖ Place big tables in guest rooms to avoid guests having to eat sitting on the floor
- ❖ Only eat with the right hand, as the left is considered 'unclean'

## Drinks

- ❖ Offer black tea with sprigs of fresh mint leaves
- ❖ Tea is generally drunk very sweet
- ❖ Offer a good selection of non-alcoholic beverages
- ❖ Be aware that coffee is often brought by the guests themselves

## Arabic Phrases

|                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Good day                   | <i>Salam aleikhum</i> (pronounced: sala maleicum)    |
| Good morning               | <i>Sabah elkheir</i> (pronounced: sabba elsher)      |
| Good evening               | <i>Masah elkheir</i> (pronounced: masse elsher)      |
| Good night                 | <i>Tisbah ala kheir</i> (pronounced: tisba ala kair) |
| Welcome                    | <i>Marhaba</i>                                       |
| Thank you                  | <i>Shokran</i> (pronounced: shukran)                 |
| Please                     | <i>Afoin</i> (pronounced: affoan)                    |
| See you again              | <i>Maa salama</i>                                    |
| One moment please          | <i>Min fadlak</i>                                    |
| Excuse me please           | <i>Lau samahat</i>                                   |
| I wish you a pleasant stay | <i>Ekama saida</i>                                   |

## **Titles**

The confusing name sequences are constructed with between three and six elements:

- ❖ Social status
- ❖ First name and family ties
- ❖ Father and sometimes grandfathers' names
- ❖ Social and geographic origin
- ❖ Sometimes honour titles and occupational titles

The social rank is always mentioned at the beginning of the name; this is especially clear for heads of state, e.g. Emir (Arab. Amir), Sultan, Malik (king) or Rais (president). In the UAE the rulers do not call each other Emir, but rather Sheikh.

This is followed by the first name, which is followed by the description of family ties/connections. For boys 'Ibn' (son of), for girls 'Bint' (daughter of), for fathers 'Abu' (Father of). An especially honorable title is 'Umm' (mother of), followed by the eldest son's name.

These are followed by the social or geographic origins.

Muslims who have fulfilled their trips to the holy sites of Mecca and Medina carry the honorary title of Hajj, although this is seldom used in the Emirates or Gulf of Oman. The job title is often also part of the title, e.g. 'Imam' (priest), 'Qadi' (judge) or 'Hakim' (doctor). The surname always stands last.