



EDC GUIDE

CULTURAL TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS IN SINGAPORE

How to maximize your success

Canada

 **EDC**
TAKE ON **THE WORLD**

When it comes to business etiquette, what's acceptable in one country, may not be in another. To be successful in international trade, you need to understand the culture, traditions and business habits of your clients and partners in your target markets and adapt your communication and business strategies accordingly.

It could mean the difference between winning—or losing—a contract.

Singapore is a key trading partner for Canada and continues to offer investment and exporting opportunities for Canadian businesses, as our economy recovers from the impacts of COVID-19. Cultural differences vary from country to country, but by adapting your negotiation and communication strategy, you can optimize your success for doing business in Singapore.

5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

1. **Small, but very diverse:** Singapore is an urbanized, multicultural, island city-state in Southeast Asia comprised of a mainland and other islands, located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. At 728-square kilometres, it's small in size, but a top global trade and financial hub. With a population of 5.9 million, English is widely spoken on this cosmopolitan, diverse island, which is home to Chinese, Malay and Tamil Singaporeans, as well as expats from around the world. Your business counterparts can cover the gamut from very sophisticated to more conservative and traditional. Do your homework before meeting and tailor your approach.
2. **Relationships are important:** Singaporean businesspeople tend to be pragmatic and matter of fact, but don't underestimate the role of relationships and the importance of in-person visits. Trust is an important foundation for fostering lasting relationships and will come in handy during challenging, complex negotiations.
3. **Meetings and attire:** Punctuality is a virtue both for meetings and other business commitments. Elders are held in the highest esteem, so it's polite to address an elder first. While handshaking is a common form of greetings, it's best to allow Muslim women to initiate the handshake. For most conferences and meetings, dress tends to be more formal, so you may want to think twice about arriving on foot in blistering heat. Classified as a tropical rainforest climate, the weather in Singapore can be hot, humid and wet, so plan how you'll arrive at your meeting accordingly. While Singapore boasts an extremely competent and reliable transportation system, you may want to opt for a taxi when going to an important meeting. Gifts aren't generally exchanged.
4. **Get to the point:** Business meetings can be very direct and should relax as the comfort level increases, but this can vary given the diversity of cultures. When in doubt, talk about food, which is a unifying cultural thread and a great icebreaker. Singaporeans are extremely proud of their street food vendors or "hawker stalls" and has more than 40 Michelin-starred restaurants. Travel is another good topic, but don't assume you know where someone is from.
5. **Business negotiations:** During negotiations, maintain a polite, calm demeanour and focus on the individual rather than a stereotype given the country's diverse culture. In general, Singaporeans enjoy bargaining when in negotiation, which can be slow at times, but the process allows relationships to develop. A direct "no" is firm, so it's wise to pursue alternatives. Saving face remains an important factor as in most other Asian cultures.



INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT SINGAPORE

- › Singapore boasts world-class infrastructure and dazzling architecture, including the man-made Gardens by the Bay and stunning Changi International Airport. Singapore is one of the greenest cities in the world with nearly half of the land area covered with greenery, including the UNESCO World Heritage Singapore Botanic Gardens.
- › Singapore has signed 15 bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) and 11 regional FTAs with trading partners, including Canada—the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)—making it a regional financial, trade and technology hub.
- › There are four official languages in Singapore: English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Singlish, an infusion of these four languages with English, a form of slang (ex: adding "lah" and "leh" to sentences) is frequently spoken by local Singaporeans in informal and social settings.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- › Visit EDC's country and market info page about [Singapore](#).
- › Visit the [Canadian Trade Commissioner Service](#) pages about [Singapore](#).
- › Visit the [Canada-Singapore Chamber of Commerce](#) [site](#).
- › Visit the [Canada-ASEAN Business Council](#) [site](#).
- › Reach out to [Joy Rankothge](#), EDC's chief representative for Singapore.

ABOUT EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CANADA

Who are we?

Export Development Canada (EDC) is Canada's export credit agency. Our job is to support and develop Canada's export trade by helping Canadian companies respond to international business opportunities. We're a self-financing Crown Corporation that operates at arm's length from the Government of Canada.

Disclaimer

This document is a compilation of publicly available information. It's not intended to provide specific advice and shouldn't be relied on as such. It's intended as an overview only. No action or decision should be taken without detailed independent research and professional advice concerning the specific subject matter of such action or decision. While Export Development Canada (EDC) has made reasonable commercial efforts to ensure that the information contained in this document is accurate, EDC doesn't represent or warrant the accurateness, timeliness or completeness of the information contained herein. This document or any part of it may become obsolete at any time. It's the user's responsibility to verify any information contained herein before relying on such information. EDC isn't liable in any manner whatsoever for any loss or damage caused by or resulting from any inaccuracies, errors or omissions in the information contained in this document. This document isn't intended to and doesn't constitute legal or tax advice. For legal or tax advice, please consult a qualified professional. EDC is the owner of trademarks and official marks. Any use of an EDC trademark or official mark without written permission is strictly prohibited. All other trademarks appearing in this document are the property of their respective owners. The information presented is subject to change without notice. EDC assumes no responsibility for inaccuracies contained herein.

Copyright © 2021 Export Development Canada. All rights reserved.