



EDC'S GUIDE

# CULTURAL TIPS FOR DOING BUSINESS IN LATIN AMERICA

How to maximize your business success

Canada

  
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.

Latin America 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 in doing business in Latin America.

# TOP 5 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

- 1. Latin America isn't a country.** Even though the region was, for the most part, colonized by Europeans—mainly Spanish and Portuguese—each country in Latin America has its own culture, values and traditions. A strategy that works well in Mexico, for example, may not be suitable in Colombia or Argentina. It's essential to tailor your business plan for each market.
- 2. Personal relationships are highly important.** Latin America is a people-oriented region. Before engaging in business discussions, counterparties usually make an effort to learn about you, your company and country. This may take time, but it's key to creating relationships of trust and confidence.
- 3. Language is key.** Spanish is the official language of most countries in Latin America, except for Brazil, where Portuguese is predominantly spoken. English is accepted within the business community, but learning basic words in the local language will demonstrate your interest in establishing solid relationships over the long run.
- 4. Saying no.** Latin Americans are very reluctant to give a negative response directly. An evasive or delayed response is often a sign that more discussion may be needed before a deal closes. Working with a local partner will help you overcome language barriers.
- 5. Slow down.** Compared to Europe and North America, business negotiations in Latin America take time. Small talk helps establish trust and mutual interest. It's always important to demonstrate to your counterparties that they're important for your strategy, so spend time understanding their business, values, interests and priorities. Avoid unnecessary texting, looking repeatedly at your watch or talking about your busy schedule.



DOING BUSINESS IN

# MEXICO





## 5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

- 1. Learn a little Spanish.** Mexicans appreciate any effort you make on this front, but stick with the basics such as “Good morning” or “Pleasure to meet you.” If you don’t speak Spanish, don’t try to do your pitch in Spanish. Keep it to simple phrases. If you make a mistake, it’s not an issue. You can share a laugh about it.
- 2. Embrace the country.** Mexicans are proud of their culture and will value your appreciation of their country. Talk about their beautiful cities, music and food. For example, become familiar with the landmarks in their cities and talk about those.
- 3. Ace the small talk.** Before getting down to business, Mexicans tend to start with small talk. Learn a little about the culture, including researching famous Mexicans and knowing a bit about Mexico’s sporting passion—soccer. You can also expect questions about your culture, especially about Canadian winter sports and life in Canada.
- 4. Engage local help.** In Mexico, having a local representative or partner will be invaluable to solve potential problems and issues. Good relationships with local contacts can help in getting responses, dealing with logistical issues and following up. You need someone on the ground to know the local processes and thinking.
- 5. When yes means no.** Mexicans don’t like to say no, so understanding body language is important and it’ll come with time. There are, again, regional differences on this tip. It’s more common to get a straight no in larger cities, but even there, your counterpart might say yes when they mean no. That’s why face-to-face is best. You can walk away from a conference call thinking went well, but if you’d seen their face and body language, you’d know better.



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT MEXICO

- › Mexico is the seventh-most visited country in the world.
- › Mexico has more than 14 signed FTAs, including the Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA), making it a regional manufacturing and exporting hub.
- › Mexico has 34 UNESCO world heritage sites and is home to one of the seven wonders of the world, the stepped pyramid, El Castillo.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › Visit EDC’s country and market info page about [Mexico](#).
- › Visit the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service pages about [Mexico](#).
- › Visit the Canada-Mexico Chamber of Commerce [site](#).
- › Reach out to [Jorge Rave](#), EDC’s chief representative for Mexico.



DOING BUSINESS IN

# BRAZIL





# BRAZIL

## 5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

- 1. Learn from the most experienced.** Partners and suppliers who have gone into Brazil can be a great source of market knowledge, by providing advice on the dos and don'ts, key contacts, learnings and potential challenges. Gaining this experience prior to a planned market visit will save you time and effort.
- 2. In-person meetings.** It's recommended that you make appointments well in advance (two to three weeks prior) and confirm them in writing. It's common for Brazilians to cancel or reschedule meetings, so always allow time for changes in your market visit. Business attire is recommended for all meetings, except on field sites.
- 3. Business negotiations.** For Brazilians, verbal agreements are highly important, but contracts are always signed formally with the support from legal counsel and a tax advisor. Brazilians tend to be detail-oriented and usually take a long time to review contracts. Make sure you provide ample time for this.
- 4. Have a local subsidiary/representative for support.** While Brazilians regularly use remote communication, for the long-term business relationships, they expect to negotiate locally with their suppliers and contractors. In addition, it's highly important that, where required, technical support and training be made available in the local language (Portuguese).
- 5. Country size and diversity:** Brazil is the fifth-largest country in the world. While Portuguese is its official language, there are several cultural differences throughout the country, including different forms of communication and negotiation with partners and customers. Engagement strategies should also consider the local/regional business environment. It's also important to be aware of travel logistics as you'll likely have to fly long distances between cities.



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT BRAZIL

- › Brazil is the sixth-largest country in the world in terms of population, with 215 million people.
- › Brazil is a leader in the use of renewable energy and has one of the cleanest energy matrix in the world: 90% of Brazilian vehicles use ethanol (green fuel).
- › Soccer is the most popular sport and Brazil is the only country that has won five World Cups.
- › Christ the Redeemer, a colossal statue of Jesus in Rio de Janeiro, is one of the new seven wonders of the world.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › Visit EDC's country and market info page about [Brazil](#).
- › Visit the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service pages about [Brazil](#).
- › Visit the Brazil-Canada Chamber of Commerce [site](#).
- › Reach out to [Fernanda Custodio](#) and/or [Monica Busch](#), EDC's senior regional managers for Brazil.
- › Check out the [Brazil responsible business conduct guide](#)



DOING BUSINESS IN

# COLOMBIA



## 5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

- 1. Facetime matters:** Even if you have a representative in Colombia looking after your business, your counterparts will want to negotiate with you and senior members of your team. Spending time with them might make the difference in securing future deals. Take advantage of today's virtual tools to keep in contact. WhatsApp is one of the most common and fastest way in Colombia to stay connected.
- 2. Patience is a must:** Business takes longer in Colombia than it does in North America, and it can often feel like it's one step forward and two steps back. Don't get discouraged. Be persistent and keep following up. Pay attention to the market news and events that could impact public tenders.
- 3. Do your due diligence:** Invest time in getting to know your customer, understand their corporate governance, read through their sustainability reports, yearly plans and industry insights. All these will save you time and help you be more assertive in your meetings. It's also a good idea to have your documents prepared in Spanish. This will tell your customers you're ready to do business.
- 4. Connect the dots:** Colombia is a price-sensitive market. Prepare the arguments to defend your solution, focus on their needs and how your solution can add value to their operations. Always remember to connect the dots from the customer's standpoint.
- 5. Make them feel supported:** Provide adequate structures and tools to support your customers before, during and after completing negotiations. Relationships don't end after the transaction is completed. Build long-lasting partners.

## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT COLOMBIA

- › Remember: It's Colombia, not Columbia.
- › Avoid referring to Colombia's history with drugs and cartels and even the television show, *Narcos*.
- › There are various business hubs in Colombia, be prepared to engage with companies based in cities other than Bogota, including Medellin, Cali and Barranquilla.
- › If you're offered a *tinto* at a meeting in Colombia, don't worry, they're talking about coffee, not red wine.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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



# DOING BUSINESS IN CHILE





# CHILE

## 5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

- 1. Meeting your contact/client:** To break into this market, there's no substitute for face-to-face meetings. Chileans expect a personal and trusted relationship with suppliers. Initial communication by phone or email is far less effective than an in-person or virtual meeting. To be successful, it's essential to network actively and regularly. Meetings should be scheduled two weeks in advance, but always confirm the appointment one to two days beforehand. Be punctual and dress in business attire. The first contact is generally a get-to-know-you meeting, so don't expect to close any business deals at this point. Chileans rarely make final decisions until they've discussed the details with upper management.
- 2. Ace the small talk during your meeting:** Business-like behaviour mixed with a bit of humour will take you a long way. Personal relationships are key to doing business in Chile, so expect some light conversation before getting down to business.
- 3. Learn a little Spanish:** Many Chilean businesspeople are well-educated professionals who travel internationally and speak English. But lower levels in the hierarchy may not speak English, so being able to speak Spanish or having someone on your team who speaks the language is strongly recommended. Product marketing and promotional materials should also be written in Spanish and your business cards should be printed with English on one side and Spanish on the other. Generally, cards are presented to everyone in a meeting.
- 4. Engage local help:** in Chile, having a local representative or partner is invaluable. Good relationships with local contacts can help you solve problems, deal with logistical issues and handle follow-up calls with customers. You need someone on the ground to know the local processes and thinking. Large buyers may ask you for local presence to ensure quality after-sale service.
- 5. When yes means no:** Chileans generally don't like to say no, so understanding body language is important. It's more common to get a straight no in larger cities, but even there, your counterpart might say yes when they mean no. That's why face-to-face meetings are best. You can walk away from a conference call thinking everything is splendid, but if you'd seen their face and body language, you'd know better.



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT CHILE

- › Chile is one of the world's largest producers of wine and is ranked as one of the top wine destinations to visit.
- › At 300 metres, the 64-storey Gran Torre Santiago is the tallest building in South America.
- › The Atacama Desert, a 1,600-kilometre strip of land, is one of the driest places on Earth and is used as an experimental site for expedition simulations to Mars.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › Visit EDC's country and market info page about [Chile](#).
- › Visit the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service pages about [Chile](#).
- › Visit the Canada-Chilean Chamber of Commerce [site](#).
- › Reach out to [Christian Daroch](#), EDC's senior regional manager for Chile.



# DOING BUSINESS IN PERU





## 5 KEY ETIQUETTE TIPS

1. **Establish personal contacts:** Relationships are essential for your success, so it's crucial to build confidence and trust from the offset. Prepare for your first meeting by learning more about them, their interests and common topics you may share. As you develop a rapport, invite your counterpart to lunch or dinner: a casual atmosphere can help build relationships over the long term.
2. **Speak the language:** Most of Peru's business class speaks and understands English. However, Peruvians feel more comfortable when a conversation can be held in their local language. While not a deal breaker at first, if you want to be successful over the long run, it's wise that a key member of your company be fluent in Spanish.
3. **Appreciate the heritage:** Peruvians are mostly proud of their food, cultural heritage and renowned landmarks, like Machu Picchu. Be open to learn more about the country and be prepared to speak about the local gastronomy and tourist attractions. Don't be shy to ask for recommendations. They'll be very valued.
4. **Reinforce Canada's strengths:** Canada is one of the largest international investors in the Peruvian mining sector, and Canadian companies and technology are often regarded as some of the most competitive, reliable and innovative. Referring to Canada when doing business can be a great advantage for your market ventures.
5. **Exercise due diligence:** Do your homework before meeting with a prospective business partner and be mindful of conducting a comprehensive due diligence. Be prepared to examine the company's track record, reliability, credit strength and reputation. Investigate all aspects of corporate social responsibility, especially those regarding environmental and social aspects.



## INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT PERU

- › Machu Picchu was South America's leading tourist attraction in 2020, and is one of the seven wonders of the world.
- › Peru has more than 3,000 types of potatoes, which are often used in its exquisite cuisine.
- › Peru has more than 90 microclimates, plus Lake Titicaca is the highest lake in the world at 3,485 metres.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- › Visit EDC's country and market info page about [Peru](#).
- › Visit the Canadian Trade Commissioner Service pages about [Peru](#).
- › Visit the Canada-Peruvian Chamber of Commerce [site](#).
- › Reach out to [Rafael Castillo](#), EDC's regional manager for Peru.



## 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.