Etiquette Dinner

DINING DILEMMA QUICK GUIDE

Table Manners	• Crumbs – Leave them or discreetly brush away with your napkin. • Gristle/Bones – Remove discreetly with napkin or utensil, place on plate. • Napkin Dropped – Ask server for a replacement. • Purse/Phone – Keep off the table. Phone only if urgent (explain to table-mates). • Dessert Plate – Move down before eating. • Dropped Food – Leave it; server will clear. • Bread Plate Taken – Use the other side or ask for another. • Finished Napkin – Place neatly to the left of your plate.
Food and Drink	• Dislike Meal – Eat what you can; avoid negative comments. • Wine Order – Ask server for pairing advice, discreetly show price point. • Allergies – Tell host in advance or quietly inform server. • Food in Teeth – Excuse yourself to restroom; no toothpicks at table. • Coffee – Leave cup untouched or cover with hand to decline. • ToGo Box – Not appropriate at formal/business meals.
Conversation and Conduct	• Silent Table – Start light, neutral conversation. • Nonstop Talker – Redirect to include others. • Phone Call – Inform host beforehand, excuse yourself discreetly. • Saying Grace – Respectfully follow host's lead. • Photos – Ask host/group before posting; LinkedIn is safest.
Timing and Hosting	• Wait to Eat – Begin only after everyone is served. • Extra Guest – Only if host explicitly invites. • Partner – Bring only if invitation includes them. • Introductions – Introduce yourself and invite others to share.
Dress Codes	• If Unsure – Business attire is safest; remove tie if overdressed. • Women – Business Casual: Slacks/skirts/blouses. Business: Suits/dresses. Formal: Cocktail or evening gowns. • Men – Business Casual: Slacks/collared shirts. Business: Suits with ties. Formal: Tuxedos or dark suits.
Special Situations	• Finger Food with Utensils – Use utensils unless host indicates otherwise. • Friend Visiting – Do not invite unless host offers.

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KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Dining and networking customs can vary by country, culture, and venue. Before attending, take a few minutes to understand the local norms so you can focus on building relationships rather than wondering what to do.

Utensils

Know the dining style commonly used at your destination. Some cultures favor Continental style, while others may use different utensils or customs, such as chopsticks and shared serving utensils. When in doubt, observe your host and follow their lead.

Tipping

Tipping expectations vary widely. In some countries, tipping is customary; in others, service may already be included or tipping may be optional. Check the local convention before the meal so you know what is appropriate.

Hierarchies: Seating & Serving Food

In some cultures, seniority, status, or the host's role influences where people sit, who begins eating first, and how food is served. Avoid choosing a seat or starting the meal too quickly when hierarchy may matter—wait for guidance from the host.

Polite Conversation Topics

Choose topics that help build rapport without putting others on the spot. Work, travel, the event, shared interests, and light personal topics are generally safe starting points. Be cautious with politics, religion, compensation, highly personal questions, gossip, or other potentially sensitive subjects.

Alcohol Consumption

Understand both the local drinking culture and the expectations of the event. You never need to drink alcohol to participate professionally. If you do, pace yourself and maintain the same judgment, composure, and professionalism you would in any business setting.

Body Language & Gestures

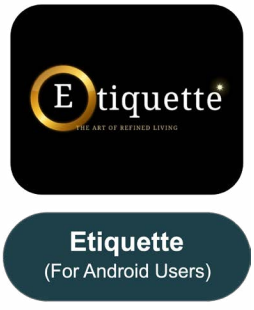
Gestures, eye contact, personal space, and physical greetings do not mean the same thing everywhere. A gesture that feels friendly in one culture may be inappropriate in another. When traveling internationally, learn a few key local norms and observe before assuming.

GO DEEPER

If you want to know more, you can:

- Ask your preferred AI tool for country- or situation-specific etiquette guidance
- Download an etiquette app for quick reference on the go
- Use trusted online resources to check international business and dining customs





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