Business Culture in Spain

There's much more to than just eating tapas by the Mediterranean and exploring ancient Roman ruins.

Spain is the 4th largest economy in the European Union and one of the top 20 exporters anywhere in the world. Spain is the home of a number of international corporations, in addition to its renowned tourism industry.

Before you complete any deals on the Iberian Peninsula, you'll need a good handle on the local business customs that will be expected of you, even as an expatriate.

A Note on the Language

If you've taken any Spanish lessons in the past, you may have learned that the Spanish spoken in Spain differs from what is spoken in Mexico and South America. The differences between the Mexican Spanish and Castilian Spanish dialects are subtle enough that you should be fine using the both interchangeably. One thing to take note of is that Castilian Spanish pronounces “Z” as “Theta”, (similar to how “th” is pronounced in English) rather than the Mexican “Zeta”.

In the northeastern part of Spain and its outlying islands, the native language is Catalan, which is a completely different language than Spanish.

What to Expect Meeting People in Spain.

There are a few rules you'll need to become familiar with if you want your next meeting in Spain to go smoothly. Some customs are commonplace such as shaking hands upon first introduction. This is always expected, just as it is in North America. However, this is typically reserved for first-time meetings. According to expat resource channel Kwintessential, once a relationship - even if only budding - has been established, it's common for men to embrace and give each other pats on the back.

Similarly, female friends will give quick kisses on both cheeks to say hello and goodbye, always starting with the left cheek.

Conducting Business Meetings in Spain

A crucial part of conducting a successful business meeting in Spain is to gain the trust of the potential partner, co-worker or employer. This means that you'll need to spend a good deal of time with the business partner before any deals are actually discussed. Once you've built up this rapport, it is acceptable to discuss moving forward with the transaction.

While this form of business courtship may take more time and nurturing than in other parts of the world, you can expect to be rewarded for it. In the United States many
people like to get straight to business and don’t have time for small-talk or to discuss personal matters. This is the exact opposite situation when doing business in Spain (and most European countries).

By developing a more meaningful relationship, business partners will have a stronger allegiance to you as a person then a traditional business relationship. This can really come in handy when it is time to grow your network - both professional and personal - in country.

**Remember Your Behaviors and Appearance**
By and large, Spanish businesses will always opt for in-person meetings when appropriate, as opposed to phone or teleconferences.

Kwintessential noted that many business dealings can hinge on how you present yourself - including how you speak about your past achievements. While in some countries, it is expected of you to tout your past successes in the workforce, this can come across as boastful in Spain. It's much better to err on the side of modesty when talking about your accomplishments.

**Know Your Place**
"Going over someone's head" is generally frowned upon in most countries, and this is especially true in Spain.

Hierarchy and seniority within the company should dictate whom you have meetings with, and certainly important when it comes to any form of negotiation. Be sure to do business with those who are on the same level as you professionally.

Spain is not only a fantastic place live, learn and travel, but has ample opportunity for business and career development especially if you embrace their local customs.

It is also important to evaluate the risks and viability of doing business internationally, make sure to read our [Spain risk assessment guide](#). As an expatriate working abroad, you will need to know about the business customs of any country you will be doing business in. Learn more about the [business customs in Japan](#).