

Diplomatic Protocol.

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Communicating.

Addressing Others

Although guidelines exist, proper forms of address vary greatly from culture to culture. Be sure to check local customs, but a few general rules follow.

The spirit of formality among diplomatic representatives usually means not addressing others by their first names as quickly as is done in the United States. One should rely on courtesy titles until invited to do otherwise. Socially, one can refer to a spouse by their first name or as "my husband," or "my wife" rather than as "Mr./Mrs. Smith." When dealing with household employees however, you should still refer to your spouse as "Mr./Mrs. Smith."

Ambassadors are addressed as Mr./Madam Ambassador or Ambassador Jones. Only by special invitation or long friendship should one address an ambassador by first name and then only when not in the public eye. In indirect address, refer to the ambassador as "the ambassador", with his/her spouse as "the ambassador and Mr./Mrs. Jones", or if the ambassador's spouse is a woman who kept her maiden name after marriage, "the ambassador and his wife, Ms. Smith." An ambassador of the United States may continue to be addressed as "Mr./Madam Ambassador" after retirement or after returning from his/her duties abroad. In some French-speaking countries, the wife of the ambassador may be referred to as Madam Ambassador. Therefore, in those countries, refer to a female ambassador by her last name (Ambassador Jones) to avoid confusion and ensure that she receives her due respect.

Those of rank below Ambassador are addressed as Mr., Ms. or Mrs., if marital status is known.

Introductions

The purpose of making introductions is to exchange names between people so that a conversation can follow. For a formal occasion, the traditional "Mrs. Smith, may I present Mr. Jones?" is used internationally. For less formal occasions simply stating the two names, "Mrs. Smith, Mr. Jones," is acceptable. Making personal introductions (i.e., introducing oneself) is perfectly acceptable and encouraged. Adding context about yourself and your role is helpful. For example, "Hello, I'm Jane Smith, Vice Consul at the United States Embassy." In English, the accepted, formal response to any introduction is, "How do you do?" Informally, a smile, "Hello," or, "It's nice to meet you," are fine. Other languages have very particular phrases, so be sure to learn them upon arriving at post.

When making introductions, honor is recognized by the name spoken first. Courtesy gives honor to those who are older, higher in rank, titled, have a professional status, or are female.

However, women are introduced to ambassadors, heads of state, royalty, and dignitaries of the church. To make the introductions more pleasant, tell each individual a bit of information about the other. This encourages the conversation to continue.

As they do when a woman enters the room, men should rise when being introduced to a woman. In some countries, a man kisses a married woman's hand. Men also rise when being introduced to another man. Women should rise when being introduced to another woman for whom she wishes to show great respect, such as the hostess, a very distinguished woman, or much older woman. In some countries, women rise when introduced to all others.

Throughout the world, greeting and leave-taking customs may include handshakes, salutatory gestures or other specific expressions. If there is such a tradition, use it with host country nationals, foreigners and fellow staff members. Failure to abide with tradition may be interpreted as rudeness or a lack of respect for colleagues.

The best and most courteous way to handle recognizing someone without recalling his or her name is to mention your name again. For example, "Good evening, I'm Jim Smith. We met recently at the ambassador's home. I'm pleased to see you again." More than likely, he/she will reintroduce himself/herself. Starting from the assumption that he/she may also not remember your name could save both of you potential embarrassment.

Titles

Forms of address for foreign government officials and people holding professional, ecclesiastical, or traditional titles vary among countries. The correct local usage can be verified at post. Following are titles for US and some foreign officials that are widely used in both spoken and written address. It is appropriate to begin letters and refer to others directly and indirectly with the following titles.

Diplomatic Titles

Chiefs of Mission

Mr./Madam Ambassador (this also applies to an ambassador with a military title), or
Ambassador Reed.

Sir Richard - British ambassador who is a knight (Sir Richard's wife would be addressed as "Lady Smith".)

Lord Montgomery - British ambassador who is a baron

Mr./Mrs. Douglas or Ms. Williams - the ambassador's spouse

Chargé d. Affaires

Mr./Ms/Mrs./Madam Randal

Ministers and Others

Mr./Madam Taylor

Although the US does not use the term, "Excellency", some countries do when referring to ambassadors. Even if the host country uses the term "Excellency", American chiefs of mission in those countries are addressed as "Mr./Madam Ambassador" by US citizens. Foreign chiefs of mission who are accredited to the US are also referred to as ambassadors.

Entertaining.

Entertaining widens one's circle of friends among officials and private citizens of the host country and other Foreign Service officers and diplomats. It also facilitates the informal exchange of information. Just as being a guest at a host country event affords the American diplomat an opportunity to experience the host country's culture, guests of embassy officers will expect to experience American culture. When planning the event, one must carefully consider whom to invite and how formal or informal the event will be. Also, be aware of the local customs on reciprocity.

The ambassador fulfills the obligation for formal entertaining for the mission; however, many staff members often have entertaining responsibilities as well. The type of entertaining depends on one's preferences, purpose, resources, and available facilities. For example, events can be hosted at one's home, a local restaurant, or club. Representational events need not be large, elaborate, or expensive. In many situations, a simple lunch or a backyard barbeque can be more effective (and enjoyable) than an elaborate dinner or reception.

Whom to Invite

Everyone in the diplomatic and consular community understands the need to make friends quickly. Therefore, it is perfectly acceptable to invite new acquaintances, as well as individuals one wishes to meet, even before receiving an invitation from them. When members of the host government are invited, the event becomes an official function of the US Mission and international protocol is in order. Well in advance of the invitations being sent, the protocol officer and/or senior officers at post should review the proposed guest list.

A common way to extend an invitation to a formal event and/or official function is through official stationary cards followed by a telephone call. Increasingly, however, the invitation is extended over the phone, and a card is sent as a reminder. Letterhead and calling cards are seldom used. Handwritten invitations on informals are a good way to extend invitations without the expense of having invitations printed. Some posts have blank stock, others do not. Check in advance to determine if this is an option at your post. As the RSVPs arrive, the protocol officer may be able to help design a proper seating arrangement.

The long-standing dilemma when entertaining abroad is the variation in responses to invitations. Invited guests may accept an invitation, but not attend. Others may not RSVP at all. Invited guests sometimes bring uninvited guests or arrive late.

Differences in the country's cultural norms and perceptions of socially acceptable behavior account for these variations. When it is crucial to have an accurate guest list, one might telephone the invitees to ask if they will attend. Differences in the concept of social time affect the role of the host as well as that of the guest. Find out whether the time on an invitation will be adhered to, or

taken to mean two hours later. If guests arrive late according to custom, they will probably also leave late. The only way to learn these intricacies is by asking at post.

When making the guest list, do not assume that higher-ranking US officers are off-limits. They often consider it a pleasant change of pace to attend less formal social functions. To accommodate them, check with the ambassador's or principal officer's secretary, and confirm the date to avoid scheduling conflicts.

Informal Entertaining

At most posts, informal entertaining is not only appropriate, but also the easiest and most representative of the way Americans entertain at home. Informal events encourage both the guests and the host (ess) to relax and circulate. Furthermore, if guests feel that they will not be competing with the gala event of the year, they are more likely to reciprocate.

Informal parties can take many forms, such as family-style meals, buffet lunches and suppers, barbecues, picnics and tea parties. The key to any event is to move the guests around so they can talk to different people. Accomplish this by serving in several rooms, planning interactive games or music and dancing.

Buffet style is an excellent way to serve informal meals. The host (ess) or waiter may serve guests from the buffet, or guests may serve themselves. Tableware may be part of the buffet service or the table may be set in advance. Tables of six or eight people are more conducive to conversation than tables of four. If you choose not to set up tables, at least clear coffee tables and end tables so the guests can put down their dishes. A few tables for guests who are not comfortable eating from plates on their laps is a thoughtful touch.

If using place cards, follow the rules of precedence to determine who will be placed in the seat of honor (for a man, the seat to the right of the hostess and for a woman, the seat to the right of the host). If there is no prepared seating plan, ranking guests should be invited to sit at the host's table.

Unless there is a receiving line, the host(ess) and his/her spouse should stand near the entrance to greet guests as they arrive and also to say good-bye as they leave.

Formal Entertaining

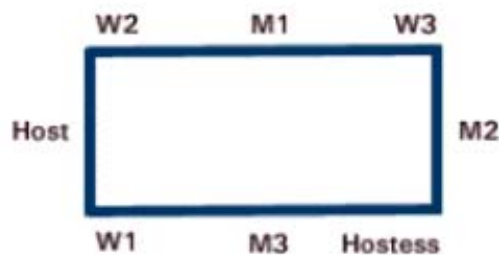
As the host(ess) of a formal event, one may call on US mission colleagues to serve as "co-hosts." Representational entertaining is a shared responsibility among officers at post. Formal entertaining includes a variety of representational events, meetings, and activities, as well as "black tie" and "white tie" dinners and receptions. A formal printed invitation should be issued well in advance, usually four to six weeks ahead. Invitations may also be extended by a phone call followed by a reminder card.

Prepare a guest list that shows the title or profession of each guest and make that list available in advance to the mission staff members who will be co-hosting with you. Occasionally, other guests or Ministry officials may request the list; it may be appropriate to provide it to them. It is appropriate to provide the list to the guest(s) of honor.

One may wish to consult the post's protocol officer for advice in creating a guest list and seating arrangement. The number of guests, their names and positions, the purpose of the party, and the shape and number of tables are but a few of the details which need to be addressed. Guidelines for seating and service follow, but keep in mind that they may be adapted to each event.

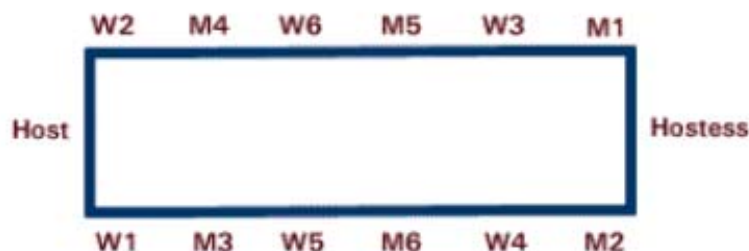
Both the guest of honor and other guests must know who has the place of honor. In the United States, the place of honor for a man is at the right of the hostess; for a woman, it is at the right of the host. However, in some countries, the place of honor is at the left of the host/hostess. The host and hostess can sit at opposite ends or across from one another at the same table. They may also be seated at separate tables. If so, each chooses a co-host or co-hostess, creating two more seats of honor. Co-hosts and co-hostesses are usually ranking guests or colleagues from the US Mission. After the guest of honor and the host(ess) or co-host(ess) are seated, the arrangement goes by rank, gender, and nationality. As a general rule, couples sit across the table from each other, not side-by-side. Several examples of possible seating arrangements are illustrated below. To seat 8, 12, 16, or 20 people without two men or two women sitting together, the hostess sits to the left of the seat that is properly hers. ("W" represents a female guest; "M" represents a male guest.)

Sample Seating Arrangement for Eight



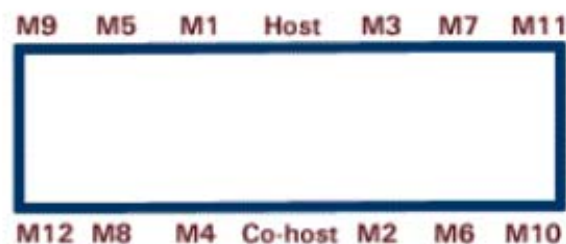
Sample Seating Arrangement for Fourteen

The most common arrangement places the host and hostess at the head and foot of the table. ("W" represents a female guest; "M" represents a male guest.)



Sample Seating Arrangement for a Men's/Women's Luncheon or Dinner

For same-sex events with only a host or hostess, a better balance of rank may be achieved by designating a co-host and having the host and co-host seated opposite of each other at the center of the table.



As a general rule, an even number of men and women alternate seats at a table. In American homes, foreign guests take precedence over Americans of comparable rank with the exception of the Ambassador of the United States. The Ambassador is seated as a host or hostess to avoid seating precedence conflicts. This courtesy also applies to the ambassador's spouse. If an unequal number of men and women (or individuals of more than one nationality) are in attendance, alternate both the sexes as well as the nationalities. One possibility is to seat the host(ess) and the guest of honor opposite each other in the middle of the long sides of the dining table and then alternate from there. The husband of a high-ranking female official is seated commensurately; do not demote him. When many high-ranking officials are expected to attend the event, if possible, seat them in a manner such that many hold a seat of honor. An excellent way of doing this is to use round tables. Using round tables is also helpful in minimizing disruptions if place settings must be removed at the last minute.

Place a seating chart in the entrance hall so that each guest may find his/her place before entering the dining room. Although rarely practiced today, men might be given a "take-in card" which designates a particular woman to escort to the table. Place cards are used when there are more than eight guests. Place them above the plates with the names and titles visible to the guests seated at either side. For the benefit of the guests across the table, consider printing the names on the back of the cards as well. When there are many tables, a table chart is often used to assist guests in locating their table.

One waiter for every six to eight guests is generally sufficient. Guests may be served in sequence around the table or women may be served before men. If guests are served in sequence, the woman on the host's right is served first. The man to her right is served next, and service proceeds counter clockwise so that the host is served last. If women are served first, the woman on the host's right is served at the same time as the woman to his left. Two servers then proceed clockwise around the table to the women and then to the men. If there is only one server per table, the direction of service should be reversed after each course so that the same guests are not always served last. Local customs for serving should be observed.

As mentioned above, seek advice at post about the local customs on toasts and drinking in general. Usually, toasts are made with the dessert course. At the end of the meal, the host or hostess makes the first move to leave the table. Guests then follow in order of precedence. Coffee may be served in another room.

For suggestions on menus, table settings and decorations, consult an etiquette book or a cookbook designed for entertaining.

Receiving Lines

At formal receptions, a receiving line enables the host and hostess to greet each guest personally. Usually, the host stands first and the hostess stands second. However, the hostess may defer to guests of honor and stand after them in line. To stand in line and receive guests with a drink or cigarette in your hand is considered discourteous.

An official staff member may introduce each guest; guests may also introduce themselves. All US staff members should help the host(ess) attend to the guests by "taking them off the line": greeting them as they finish the receiving line, accompanying them to the refreshments, and integrating them into conversations.

At the end of the event, the host should be available near the exit to say good-bye to guests. At an event hosted by the Ambassador, Deputy Chief of Mission, Public Affairs Officer, or agency head, staff members should stay until all foreign guests have departed.

Being a Guest

Certain guest responsibilities hold true whether you are attending a formal international event or a local party.

If you are a parent, you may be reluctant to leave your children behind when attending social functions. However, in most cases, children may not accompany their parents. Most social events for business or pleasure will not include children. If the event does include children, the invitation will make it very clear.

The tradition of toasting is practiced around the world. In most countries, a guest who is being toasted remains seated and does not drink to the toast. The honored guest makes a reply by standing and offering a toast to the host and hostess.

Leave a party at a reasonable hour, no matter how much fun you are having. Leaving early is better than overstaying one's welcome. But be aware that in some countries, a reasonable hour may be very late by US standards. It is best not to leave prior to the departure of the senior official of any nationality. Do not leave before the guest of honor or the senior representative of your mission leaves, especially if you are helping to host a US event. Be sure to thank the hosts before you depart, keeping the farewells brief.

You should thank your hosts in writing or by phone the next day unless the event was a very informal event or a very large reception. Thank-you notes are hand-written and signed without courtesy titles (i.e., Mark Roberts, not Mr. Roberts). If you feel the situation merits a more elaborate thank-you, let local custom be your guide for an appropriate response.

Dressing.

Through tradition and usage, diplomats have come to wear certain kinds of clothes for certain occasions. Your "uniform" will depend on the function, be it casual or formal. This section gives a description of each kind of dress and the occasions for which they are appropriate. Keep in mind that local customs impose many modifications, so be sure to check at post. Sometimes, wearing the country's ethnic or national dress in lieu of traditional dress is appropriate.

In various parts of the world, a specific nomenclature for dress has arisen. Contrary to the common meaning within US culture, in the diplomatic community, "informal dress" equates to business dress (see below). In some parts of the world, other terms for informal dress for men include "lounge suit", "national dress", "tenue de ville", "planters", "shirt and tie", "island casual", and "bush shirt". "Planters" refers to a long sleeved white shirt with a tie and dark trousers. "Bush shirt" is a long or short sleeved shirt with a finished bottom edge worn outside rather than tucked into the slacks, or a long or short sleeved embroidered man's shirt. "Island casual" means a Hawaiian shirt and casual (usually khaki) slacks.

Similarly, various terms apply to formal dress for men. "Tuxedo" and "smoking jacket" mean black tie, whereas a "Red Sea Rig" or "Gulf Rig" means a tuxedo minus the jacket. "Dinner jacket" may refer to either a dark-colored or white jacket. If you are unsure of the terminology used, it is always appropriate to clarify before the event.

For many posts, the overwhelming choice for day-to-day business is a suit and tie for men and a business suit or conservative dress for women. Men and women of all ranks of staff and spouses are expected to bring this type of clothing. Many posts stress that daily attire closely resembles that seen in Washington, DC. Although suitable dress clothing for men can often be purchased at post, it is often limited and expensive. The selection for women may be larger, but the clothing is often limited and expensive as well. Business attire for women is usually appropriate for official evening functions.

Occasionally, business attire will not be appropriate. Below are some dressing guidelines to help clarify the lines between formal and casual wear, day and evening wear. As always, exceptions to the rule exist, so be observant and inquire at post.

Formal "Black Tie" or "White Tie"

Formal wear may be worn at evening performances of the opera, the theater, balls and for the most formal of dinners and evening affairs. Black tie is generally not worn in the daytime. White tie requires the additional formality of a cutaway ("tails") and white tie for men and a floor-length ball gown for women. Above all, let the information on the invitation be your guide. If the invitation is unclear, ask when you respond to the invitation.

Male Attire

Black, hip-length coat without tails and with silk or satin lapels (a white dinner coat may be worn in hot weather and the tropics)

Low-cut black waistcoat or cummerbund may be worn with a single-breasted coat

Black trousers

White starched or pleated shirt or a soft evening shirt with studs instead of buttons
Wing, turn-down, or attached collar and black bow tie
Black shoes and socks
Hats and gloves are optional but not worn or carried indoors

Female Attire

Knee-length cocktail dress
Floor-length ball gown
Long skirt with top
High-heeled shoes or dressy flats

Above-elbow gloves are optional with a sleeveless evening gown, and short gloves may be worn with a long-sleeved gown. If worn, gloves need not be removed for a receiving line or dancing, but are removed prior to eating or drinking.

Semi-Formal/Informal

Semi-formal/Informal wear may be worn for cocktail parties, dinners, some dances, the theater, the opera and evening receptions.

Male Attire

Dark suit
Tie or bow tie
Dark shoes and socks

Female Attire

Short cocktail dress
Gloves may be worn if the event is outside
High-heeled shoes or dressy flats

Casual

Unlike the United States, most countries do not define casual as jeans and sneakers or sportswear. Shorts and jeans, for men and women, are considered inappropriate attire for social functions in many parts of the world. Instead, you will find that business attire is usually appropriate for an event specified as casual. Breakfast, lunch, daytime meetings, afternoon tea, and some receptions are generally considered casual, but the invitation should specify.

Male Attire

Business suit (light or dark) or
Sports jacket and pants
Tie or bow tie
Dress shoes or loafers

Female Attire

Business suit or daytime dress

Pumps or flats

Hats and gloves are optional - head coverings may be considered a requirement at some events. Hats may also provide welcome and necessary protection from the sun; check with the post.

Medals and Decorations

Foreign Service officers are prohibited from accepting decorations from foreign governments. If you wish to wear war service decorations or civilian medals at formal day or evening events, check with the protocol officer. If appropriate, wear them on your left lapel or over the left breast pocket, US military medals above US civilian medals.

Ambassadors.

An ambassador serving abroad symbolizes the sovereignty of his/her home country and serves as the personal representative of its head of state. Ambassadorial duties include negotiating agreements, reporting on political, economic and social conditions, advising on policy options, protecting home country interests, and coordinating the activities of all home country agencies and personnel in the host country. By virtue of the position, ambassadors abroad rely on the support of and are afforded special courtesies by the entire mission staff. These courtesies apply to the ambassadors of other countries as well.

In direct conversation, address an ambassador as Mr./Madam Ambassador or Ambassador Tolstoy. His/her spouse should be referred to as Mr./Mrs. Tolstoy or Ms. Tolstoy, if the spouse is a woman who kept her maiden name after marriage. It is proper to rise when an ambassador and/or his/her spouse enters a room just as you would for the head of state. When making introductions to an ambassador, everyone but a head of state is presented to him/her. In other words, the ambassador's name and title is stated first, then the person being introduced. An ambassador and his/her spouse precede all others when entering or leaving a room. The official place for the ambassador in the car is the backseat, curbside. His/her car is allowed to pass before all others. At ceremonies that take place on ships, the ambassador is the first to step on deck and the first to step off, and at airport ceremonies, he/she is the last to board and the first to disembark. When you attend social functions that the ambassador and other high-ranking diplomatic officers are also attending, you should arrive approximately fifteen minutes early and make a special point to greet these officers. A personal greeting, however, is not necessary at a very large reception. Many of these courtesies are also extended to senior officers and visiting officials such as members of the Cabinet or members of parliament.

Social Tips.

Invitations and Responses

Cultural differences abound in issuing and responding to invitations. In most cases, the invitation will come addressed to all the family members invited. If a spouse is not specifically

named, he/she is probably not invited. It is inappropriate to bring a date to a working event. However, in some places, one invitation addressed to the family is meant to include everyone in the house, even guests and visitors. Responding is very important and should be done, generally by phone, within two days of receiving the invitation. Be sure to observe the request on the invitation. "Regrets only" means to call only if you will not attend, and "RSVP" means to respond whether you will or will not attend.

Greetings and Forms of Address

Although you should follow the guidelines about greeting, addressing and introducing someone in the formal international scene, you will need to learn about the local informal customs as well. Try to learn a few polite greetings in the native language that will get you through the more casual social situations. You will also need to be aware of different greeting rituals such as kisses, handshakes or bows. In some countries, for example, it is not uncommon to see men show affection. Tremendous differences exist in how close people stand to socialize, how loudly they speak, and how much eye contact they maintain. The best advice is to be observant and ask questions of the foreign service nationals and experienced officers at post. Show interest and concern in learning a different culture; most people will respond graciously.

Local concept of social time

In some countries, an invitation for 8:00 p.m. means you should arrive at precisely 8:00 p.m. In some other countries, it means you should arrive no earlier than 9:30 p.m. To avoid awkward and embarrassing situations, ask questions before attending social events. The Foreign Service nationals who work in the mission are a valuable resource, as are experienced officers at post.

Dress

Dress, too, varies according to country and event. Women should be particularly mindful of conservative dress rules, such as skirt length, low necklines, and having one's arms covered. Remember that "casual" in other countries almost never means jeans or shorts. It is always better to be too dressed up than too dressed down. For more details see [Dressing](#).

Conversation Topics

Be aware that there are cultural differences about what constitutes casual conversation. In some places, it is perfectly acceptable for someone to ask your age or income. Knowing what is appropriate and what to expect helps one avoid problems. Acceptable casual conversation topics vary from culture to culture. Discussing children or food is rude in some cultures. Because one circulates at social events in order to meet as many people as possible, conversations should be fairly brief.

Gifts

Even something as simple as bringing a gift to the host can be tricky. Many rituals and customs often surround the meaning of gifts. The type, color and number of flowers you bring, for example, may have a hidden meaning. In Italy, mums are funeral flowers; think twice about bringing them to a dinner party. A guest may be expected to bring a small gift, or it may be better

to bring nothing at all. Once again, asking colleagues and co-workers about local customs will be most helpful.

Eating and Drinking

To be polite, accept the food and drink that is offered. If unsure or a bit apprehensive, try a small portion. If you do not wish to drink alcohol, still take some to have in your glass for toasts. If you do drink, however, as a US representative, you should drink responsibly so as not to embarrass yourself or your country. If, for health or religious reasons, you absolutely cannot try even a small portion of a particular food or drink, it is acceptable to refuse with a short explanation. Consider new foods and drinks an opportunity to explore the new culture. Try them in good spirits and with an open mind.

Gender Issues

Gender roles vary from country to country, and sometimes even within regions of one country. For example, a husband may be expected to precede his wife in a receiving line, or men and women may go into separate rooms for dessert. Although men and women may drift away from each other and talk amongst themselves, the practice of actually separating men and women at any time during a dinner party is rare even in primarily gender-biased societies. Be aware that this may happen and when it does, it is best to go along with these traditions. Lacking a specific mission agenda, the diplomat's role is not to change host country customs. The country may not consider gender bias an issue that needs to be addressed.

Status

When everyone is treated respectfully, only a few status issues merit special note. As mentioned earlier, stand when an ambassador and his/her spouse enter the room, and allow him/her to enter and exit a room first. When making introductions, introduce someone to the more distinguished or older person. In addition, reserve the far right-hand seat of a couch, as you sit, for the guest of honor.

Thank You

Rituals often surround thanking someone. Without exception, thank your host before you leave. Tradition determines how you should thank the host the day after the event. What, how and when to send gifts may be different depending on the customs of your post. In most cases, a hand-written note is sufficient, but to be seen as an appreciative guest, look into the customs of your new country.