

Reasons for cultural differences

Worksheet 1- Guess the reasons for customs in the Arab world

Here are some traditions and customs from Arab countries and the wider Islamic world.

Do you know why these cultural traditions exist? Can you guess?

Arab and other Islam countries drink lots of sweet, strong coffee and tea and smoke a lot (e.g. hubble bubble pipes)

Men in Arab countries and some other Middle Eastern and Asian countries often hug, kiss, walk arm in arm with and even hold hands with their male relatives and friends.

As in many other countries, you should be careful where you put your feet and never show the soles of your feet to an Arab person.

Arabs are traditionally very hospitable to strangers

Many people in the Middle East and Asia don't eat, pass food, wave or shake hands with their left hands.

You should be careful about complimenting any of your Arab host's possessions

You need to be careful talking about your pets or showing them to a Middle Eastern friend

You should not ask an Arab about the health etc. of the female member of their family

Arabic men and women both wear loose clothing that covers their whole bodies.

Pork is forbidden to Muslims.

In some countries it is considered polite to burp after meals

Turkish waiters clear your plates from the table as soon as you have finished eating from it, and sometimes before!

You need to be careful when gesturing that something is okay

Reasons for cultural differences -Worksheet 2- Possible explanations

Match the sentences above to the explanations below

as both 'thumbs up' and a circle with thumb and index finger are sexual gestures.

because dogs are considered dirty and are therefore a taboo subject.

There are two separate reasons behind this. One is that it keeps the sun off your body and keeps you cool, and the other is a taboo against showing any part of a woman's body that could be considered sexually attractive.

The reason for this could be connected to the need to show hospitality at home by keeping a guest's plate full.

probably to give themselves a high that they are not allowed to get from alcohol. Another likely explanation is that it goes well with their love of taking their time and socializing. One further way explanation is that coffee comes from this part of the world.

in order to show your appreciation and that you are full.

This is because people traditionally used this one to clean themselves after they went to the toilet.

This may be because of the taboo against men touching women in public. After all, holding hands is nice and everyone wants to do it with someone!

The reason behind this is probably some kind of sexual taboo.

One possible explanation is that it quite often lead to food poisoning in places like the Arabian desert. The taboo against shell fish etc. might be for the same reason.

The most likely explanation is that the harsh desert environment the Arabs came from meant help from others was often needed.

because he might feel he has to give it to you to be hospitable.

The commonest explanation given for this is that feet are considered unclean.

Reasons for cultural differences

Answer key for Worksheets 1 and 2

Arabic men and women both wear loose clothing that covers their whole bodies. There are two separate reasons behind this. One is that it keeps the sun off your body and keeps you cool, and the other is a taboo against showing any part of a woman's body that could be considered sexually attractive.

As in many other countries, you should be careful where you put your feet and never show the soles of your feet to an Arab person. The commonest explanation given for this is that feet are considered unclean.

Many people in the Middle East and Asia don't eat, pass food, wave or shake hands with their left hands. This is because people traditionally used this one to clean themselves after they went to the toilet.

Men in Arab countries and some other Middle Eastern and Asian countries often hug, kiss, walk arm in arm with and even hold hands with their male relatives and friends. This may be because of the taboo against men touching women in public. After all, holding hands is nice and everyone wants to do it with someone!

Pork is forbidden to Muslims. One possible explanation is that it quite often lead to food poisoning in places like the Arabian desert. The taboo against shell fish etc. might be for the same reason.

Arabs are traditionally very hospitable to strangers. The most likely explanation is that the harsh desert environment the Arabs came from meant help from others was often needed.

In some countries it is considered polite to burp after meals in order to show your appreciation and that you are full.

Turkish waiters clear your plates from the table as soon as you have finished eating from it, and sometimes before! The reason for this could be connected to the need to show hospitality at home by keeping a guest's plate full.

People in many Arab and other Islam countries drink lots of sweet, strong coffee and tea and smoke a lot (e.g. hubble bubble pipes). probably to give themselves a high that they are not allowed to get from alcohol. Another likely explanation is that it goes well with their love of taking their time and socializing. One further way explanation is that coffee comes from this part of the world.

You should be careful about complimenting any of your Arab host's possessions because he might feel he has to give it to you to be hospitable.

You need to be careful talking about your pets or showing them to a Middle Eastern friend because dogs are considered dirty and are therefore a taboo subject.

You need to be careful when gesturing that something is okay as both 'thumbs up' and a circle with thumb and index finger are sexual gestures.

You should not ask an Arab about the health etc. of the female member of their family. The reason behind this is probably some kind of sexual taboo.

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Worksheet 3- Make your own reasons

Using the underlined phrases from Worksheet 2, make explanations or possible explanations for the following and guess which one your partner is talking about

In the west it is considered polite to keep your plate of food or bowl flat on the table while eating. In Japan it is considered polite to lift it up towards your face.

British people always reply to a greeting with a different greeting (e.g. "Bye" "See you")

In European countries blowing your nose in public is okay but spitting is very rude. In some Asian countries it is the opposite.

Japanese don't give reasons when apologizing

The British never show the number two with their palm facing themselves

English people usually rip open presents

In Japan it is considered polite to open presents slowly and carefully.

In Spain, your neighbours will be very unhappy if you use your washing machine or vacuum cleaner at 2 o'clock in the afternoon.

Japanese don't often say thank you to members of their close families for jobs around the house etc, or thank or compliment members of their own team in their company for their work.

British people always arrive at people's homes a little late for dinner parties.

Nowadays some women in England do not like men to open doors for them, help them with their coats, carry luggage for them etc..

There are very few lawyers in Japan

In Japan you shouldn't take a pot plant to someone in hospital