

Hand Gestures You Might Want to Know When You Travel

Hand gestures can mean different things in other countries. Before you make a hand gesture that in your country and culture means something harmless, think about where you are. It could mean the same as your country and culture, but it could also mean something rude or aggressive. Here is a list of some common hand gestures that mean one thing in some countries and another in other countries. Of course, there are many more that exist out here, but this is just a list of some common ones.

Pointing

While it is never really polite to point at someone, people in the U.S. are more okay with the gesture than people in other countries. In China and some other Asian countries, it is rude because it is typically meant for dogs.

The Two Finger Peace Sign

In the U.S. and most other countries, it means “peace,” but if you turn your palm towards you, a backwards Peace Sign, it is equivalent to showing someone the middle finger in U.K., Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand.

The Come Here Finger Wave

In the U.S., Australia, U.K., and Canada, it is a gesture that means to beckon someone to come to you. In most Asian countries, like China and the Philippines, it is highly offensive. To beckon a person to you, you should have your palm face down in front of you and motion back towards your body with your whole hand. Likewise, in Vietnam, India, and Ghana, you do the same to beckon someone to you, but once you switch your palm upwards, it is considered rude.

The Horn Fingers (Or Rocker Hand Gesture)

The Rocker hand gesture, adopted by rockers, might mean “Rock On” in the U.S., but in Italy, Spain, Portugal, Columbia, and Brazil, if you make this hand gesture at someone, you are telling them that their wife is cheating on them.

The Okay Sign

In Australia, the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., it means “okay” or indicates satisfaction. However, in Brazil, if the sign is turned upside down, it becomes a rude gesture and means the middle finger.

The Fingers All Together

In Italy, it means “what is this?” or “what do you want?” and is usually paired with a flick of the wrist. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it means a small amount of something, in Turkey, it means that something is beautiful or well, and in Egypt, it is a motion to show you’ll only be a minute.

The Thumbs Up

While in the U.S., Australia, the U.K., Canada, and Russia, it is a sign of approval, in Latin America, West Africa, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it can be seen as saying “up yours.”

The Fist and Elbow

In many Latin American countries, including Mexico and South America, this is known as “the tacafío,” which means stingy, showing that the recipient rarely reaches to pay for the bill. But in Austria and Germany, it indicates that the person is an idiot and that their brain is in their elbow.

The Thumb in a Fist

In the U.S., Australia, the U.K., and Canada, this is a common playful gesture adults use toward children having pretended to “steal” the child’s nose. In Turkey, however, it is seen as rude and aggressive.

The Crossed Fingers

In Australia, Canada, the U.S., and the U.K., it means a sign of good luck. However, in Vietnam, crossed fingers are thought to resemble female genitals and, therefore, considered lewd.

The Chin Flick

In France, Belgium, and Tunisia, people use it to express extreme disgust or to tell someone to “get lost.” But in Italy, it simply means “I don’t give a damn.”

Shaking Hands

As it is common in the U.S. to shake hands upon meeting someone, in other countries it is different. In Japan, when you meet someone, you bow. The lower you bow, the more respectful it is. In some parts of Europe, it is customary to give an air kiss on each cheek. Fijians might shake hands and then they hold it for the duration of the first meeting, and in Argentina, it is customary to hug and give a quick kiss on the cheek.

Hands in Pockets

It may seem like a good idea to do, especially if you are not sure what to do with your hands so you do not offend someone while traveling, but in some countries, it can be rude. In the U.S., it is just a chill thing to do. In some Asian countries, like Korea and Japan, it may cause some people to get upset because it is rude and a sign of arrogance.