The Arab world consists of about 20 countries stretching from Mauritania in the west to Oman in the East. Within that area is a diverse group of people bound together primarily by language and religion. While religion is a strong common denominator, adherence ranges from very strict to very liberal. The same applies to gestures and body language; some rules and actions are adhered to strictly, others less so.

Some general customs one might observe when visiting this region include:

- Avoid showing the sole of the shoe, or inadvertently pointing it at someone. The shoe soles are the lowest and dirtiest part of the body, and therefore it is rude to point them at someone.

- The right hand prevails: Eat with it, present gifts with it, touch with it. The left hand is generally regarded as the “unclean” hand and is used primarily for bodily hygiene.

- Long, direct eye contact among men is important. In-fact, staring is not necessarily considered rude or impolite.

- Public displays of affection are frowned upon.

**Egypt**

- Handshakes are customary. Greeting will be warm and expressive because Egyptians believe personal relationships are important.

- When dining, it is preferable to eat everything on your plate.

**Iran**

- Handshaking is the customary form of greeting. Good friends may greet each other with a slight embrace and a gesture of cheek-kissing.

- Men and women rarely exhibit any signs of affection in public.

- The thumbs up gesture, is considered vulgar.

- To signal “no”, move the head up and back sharply. To signal “yes”, dip the head downward with a slight twist.

**Jordan**

- Both friends and strangers are greeted warmly, with sincere handshaking. Long acquaintances of the same sex may embrace lightly and kiss either cheek.

- It is polite to leave small portions of food on your plate.

**Lebanon**

- The handshake is the customary greeting. Close friends may lightly embrace and kiss each other on the cheeks.

- While signaling, “yes” is done with a nod, to signal “no” a Lebanese may perform a sharp upward motion of the head, accompanied by raised eyebrows.
Saudi Arabia

- Men will greet each other with a light, sincere handshake, sometimes with the left hand touching the forearm, the elbow or even the shoulder of the other person. An embrace and cheek-kissing may be added.

- A Saudi man accompanied by a veiled woman will probably not introduce her.

- Saudi’s may signal “yes” by nodding the head up and down. “No” is indicated by tipping the head backward and clicking the tongue.

- Avoid excessive amounts of pointing or signaling with the hands.

- Eye contact is important. The saying that “the eyes are the windows to the soul” applies here.

- Any time you put the middle finger out, whether pointing up or down, it is considered vulgar.