India is highly spiritual country, with rich and diverse culture and traditions. Having said that, Indians are also very aware of the Western culture, have adopted many Western ways of doing things.

Greetings and meetings etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

The most common and acceptable greeting in India is to say “Namaste”. When spoken to another person, it is commonly accompanied by a slight bow made with hands pressed together, palms touching and fingers pointed upwards, in front of the chest. This gesture can also be performed wordlessly and carries the same meaning and can be used universally while meeting a person of different gender, age or social status. In Japan, the Namaste hand gesture is used in prayer. It is the customary greeting when people meet and also upon departing. A non-contact form of salutation is traditionally preferred in India and by Indian people.

“Namaste”, loosely meaning welcome or greeting, is widely accepted and understood. The gesture is an acknowledgement of respect literally meaning “I bow to you.” It can also be done by placing the hands together in front of the third eye, bowing the head, and then bringing the hands down to the heart. This is an especially deep form of respect. Although in the West the word “Namaste” is usually spoken in conjunction with the gesture, in India, it is understood that the gesture itself signifies Namaste, and therefore, it is unnecessary to say the word while bowing. You may also hear “Namaskar” used in a slightly more formal settings.

In business settings, it is also appropriate to greet with a handshake; however, some females may find physical contact inappropriate or uncomfortable. If you are a visitor, wait for the host to welcome you, either in form of a handshake or with “Namaste”. This way, you can respond appropriately, replicating their greeting.

Titles and names etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

Indians work within a formal hierarchical business structure and as such prefer to address individuals by their title followed by the family name such as Dr Jones, Mr Smith, and Mrs Cowan.

Exchanging gifts etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

When giving gifts in business context it is best to give them products are that are unique to Australia. Souvenirs and products with ECU logos are also acceptable. A range of these products are available from ECU book shops at Mt Lawley and Joondalup campuses.

When giving Australian products, remember to keep it conservative, and avoid Aussie humour. Items with expressions such as “dunny”, “Sheila” or sexual connotations should be totally avoided. Remember that people from this region are conservative and spiritual.
Non-verbal gestures etiquette in India and Sri Lanka
Most western non-verbal communication cues and gestures such as making adequate eye contact when engaging in conversation, a firm hand shake for business greetings, apply in southern Asia. One thing to note, with people from the Indian subcontinent is the wobbling of the head to indicate an affirmative or yes response. People in Indian and surrounding countries, such as Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, tend to wobble their head in agreement, and often not reinforced with a verbal message. For Westerners who are not used to this gesture may think that the person they are conversing with is disagreeing with them. To avoid, any miscommunications, always rephrase and verbally clarify your agreement.

Taboo and sensitive subjects etiquette in India and Sri Lanka
People in India practise a wide and diverse range of religions, and they are very accepting of individuals’ beliefs and values. It is reasonable to talk religion, as long as you are not preaching or trying to convert anyone.

As India is a democratic country, talking about politics isn’t taboo. However, talking politics should be avoided in Sri Lanka.

There are some subjects to avoid in India and Sri Lanka. Death is a sensitive subject in both countries and should be avoided in conversations. Obesity and weight are also sensitive topics in Sri Lanka. If you hear about a death in your Indian or Sri Lankan colleague’s family, do not offer condolence cards or gifts. It is best to express your sympathy in words only.

Sex, sexuality, and sexual orientation are not widely discussed in Indian subcontinent region. Because they are conservative people, between husbands and wives, there is not much display affection in public, and definitely no kissing in public.

Time concepts etiquette in India and Sri Lanka
You may find that Indian and people from other south Asian countries are not always punctual. For them, reasonable lateness is acceptable. Most people dealing with in Western business context will keep to time but do not be offended if they arrive late and do not offer any apologies.

People in the south Asian region tend to start their day late and as such eat late as well. Normal business trading hours are from 10 am until 6pm. However, school starts at 7am.

You will find that most restaurants will only commence setting up for dinner around 8pm.
Gender roles etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

Often, particularly with Muslims, you will find a female will be represented by a male, usually their husband, father, or brother. So it is advisable to greet and address the male first, then the female. In conversation, feel comfortable to engage with the female. However, gauge her responses. If she shies away from the conversation and the male is responding, then try and direct the questions at the male. As this is not a common practice in the Western culture, you may feel awkward communication this way, but remember different cultural norms and show respect by communicating appropriately.

Social etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

When visiting someone’s home in Asia, it is often the practice to remove your footwear and leave by the front door. This isn’t always necessary, particularly in business settings, so it is advisable to observe what your host is doing and emulate this.

Remembering southern Asia’s conservative style it is important that you dress appropriately when travelling in these countries. Most Indian and Sri Lankan males will dress in Western style, wearing a pair of trousers and a shirt. Most females prefer traditional attire. For foreign females, conservative western attire is still appropriate. It is worthwhile to carry a shawl or a scarf with you so that if necessary, it can be thrown over bare shoulders, or, over the head if entering a spiritual or religious place.

Religion and beliefs etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

People in India practise one of a wide and diverse range of religions, and they are very accepting of individuals’ beliefs and values. It is reasonable to talk religion, as long as you are not preaching or trying to convert anyone.

Most common religions being practiced in the southern Asian regions are Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, Christianity and Bahá’í Faith.

Politics etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

As India is a democratic country, talking about politics isn’t taboo. However, it may be difficult to know if the person you are engaging in conversation with has strong political views or sensitivities. Avoid starting conversations around politics in general to prevent any miscommunication and negative perceptions or opinions formed of you.

Sacred animals etiquette in India and Sri Lanka

In India and many southern Asian countries, the cow is considered a sacred animal. Equally the elephant is regarded highly and reverred.
Hygiene etiquette in India and Sri Lanka
In Southern Asia, many locals chew beetle nut. The nut of Areca palm is wrapped in leaves and chewed to give a slightly heightened alertness. Some say that the effect of chewing beetle nut is similar to that of drinking a cup of coffee. The chewing produces some red liquid in the mouth usually disposed of by spitting. As such, you will often people spitting in public. Bright red spit spots produced by beetle nut chewing are highly visible in the streets.

Hawking to clear the throat, spitting, blowing nose without a handkerchief or tissue, picking the nose in public are common practices in southern Asian countries. Whilst these may be unacceptable social behaviours in Western culture, they are all acceptable practices in the Asian region. Do not be surprised or offended by this. It is unlikely that any of your colleagues or students will display such behaviours during your university business encounters. If you witness such behaviours in your classroom, it is an opportunity for you to advise and educate your local students of Western culture and practices. If you see this in wider general public, you may not have much choice other than to look away.

Alcoholic beverages etiquette in India and Sri Lanka
Moderate consumption of alcohol is part of Indian (and Sri Lankan) social culture, except in Gujarat State, in the country's west, where alcohol is banned.

It is acceptable for females to drink alcohol socially as well, but you may notice that not many Indian females smoke cigarettes.

Many religious people do not consume alcohol.

Food etiquette in India and Sri Lanka
Every locality or region has their own style of cooking and traditional foods. There are many vegetarians in India and most restaurants offer vegetarian choices on the menu.

You very rarely find beef on the menu as cow is considered a sacred animal.

Instead there are more chicken, lamb and mutton dishes, even at the top Western style hotels and restaurants. If you see hamburger on the menu, be mindful that it is most likely made of lamb or mutton.

Equally, you do not find many pork dishes on the menu as Muslims do not eat pork or pork products.

Most vegetarians will not be offended if you wish to eat a meat dish at the same table.
Indian and Sri Lankan people are very hospitable. So they may offer for you to try different foods and delicacies. It is a good idea to try a little to show your respect and acceptance of their hospitality.

At your table setting, you most likely find a spoon and a fork, usually accompanied by a knife. For traditional items such as naan bread or chapatti, you are welcomed and probably expected to eat with your hands. In some regional areas of southern Asian countries, many locals use their hands to eat their meals, with spoons reserved for liquid items, such as soups.

**Teaching and learning in India and Sri Lanka**

Most Asian cultures hold teachers in high regards. Students from most Asian cultures trust teachers to be correct and believe them to be professional experts in their fields. They will often not ask lecturers any questions in class as they feel this may be challenging the teacher.

Students from most Asian cultures regard the text books and literature to be correct and often copy from such sources. This may bring forth issues around plagiarism.

Students from southern Asian countries are used to rote learning (learning by memorisation). Therefore some Asian students may struggle with putting theory into practice.