

Doing Business in Angola | Angolan Social and Business Culture

An Angolan Culture Overview

Fact File

- **Official name** – Republic of Angola
- **Population** – 12,799,293*
- **Official Languages** – Portuguese
- **Currency** – kwanza (AOA)
- **Capital city** – Luanda
- **GDP** – purchasing power parity \$110.3 billion*
- **GDP Per Capita** – purchasing power parity \$8,800*



Overview

Located in south-central Africa, Angola's culture is a blend of ancient African traditions and colonial Portuguese influences. Angola has experienced years of violent unrest and civil war but the rebuilding process which began at the end of the civil war in 2002 is progressing well. Angola is a forward looking nation with an economy that is growing at a constant rate due to the country's vast supply of natural resources such as oil. Understanding Angola's extremely diverse social and business culture can be challenging and doing business in Angola successfully requires a sound understanding of this complex country.

Angolan Culture - Key Concepts and Values

Religion – As a consequence of the 500-year Portuguese colonial rule, the majority of Angolans are Roman Catholic but tend to practise a mixture of Catholic and tribal beliefs and traditions. The worship of ancestors is widespread and paramount in Angolan spiritual life. It is believed that ancestors can have significant influence on their descendants' lives and are therefore highly respected.

Civil War – The 27-year-long civil war which ended in 2002 has left Angola and its citizens scarred in many aspects. The country's infrastructure and economy were mostly destroyed but have been gradually rebuilt since the end of the war. Angolans are still today suffering from the social, economic and psychological consequences of the war but are slowly redeveloping their country and rebuilding their cultural traditions.

Portuguese Influence – Besides religion, the Portuguese left their impact on several other cultural aspects. Portuguese is the official language in Angola and spoken by most Angolans as first or second language.

Doing Business in Angola

The long-lasting civil war has adversely affected the Angolan economy. However, since the end of the war in 2002, the government has started to rebuild the nation through significant economic, political and financial reforms. The country's affluent natural resources have the potential of making Angola a very wealthy nation, with the production and export of petroleum continuing to set Angola on the path to sustained economic growth. Today, Angola's efforts in reviving and maintaining political and economical stability are gaining interest from foreign investors and helping to open up the country to increasing international business opportunities.

Angola Business Part 1 - Working in Angola (Pre-departure)

○ Working practices in Angola

- Business hours in Angola are from Monday to Thursday from about 7.30am to 6.30pm with a two-hour break for lunch and on Friday only in the morning. Only some offices are open on Saturdays.
- Angolans have a more flexible attitude towards time so don't be surprised if business meetings or social events begin late.
- Schedule business appointments as far in advance as possible, preferably a month or two before the intended visit. Always confirm the appointment by calling the day before.

○ Structure and hierarchy in Angolan companies

- Business organisations in Angola tend to be hierarchical. Status is important in Angolan society and respect should be given to supervisors and work colleagues.
- In Angolan companies, decision-making power typically lies with the most senior person at the top of the company. However, similar to many other African cultures, final decisions are often made following consultation with subordinates.
- Traditional divisions of labour are not always possible due to pressing financial needs. Both genders are equally represented in the workforce. Nevertheless, there are discrepancies between the sexes as women still have a much lower literacy rate, lower wages and less influence in politics than men.

○ Working relationships in Angola

- Personal relationships are vital in Angola as Angolans prefer to do business with people they know and trust. Before going into business, take time to get to know your Angolan counterparts.
- A vital part of Angolan culture is respect for one's ancestors and elders. It is viewed as very offensive to most Angolans if the proper respect for an elder is not shown, especially in more rural areas.

- Food is often served in a communal bowl, especially during traditional meals. The eldest in the group is the first one to take food from the bowl.

Angola Business Part 2 - Doing Business in Angola

o Business practices in Angola

- Titles are important and should be used to show respect to those with authority and credentials. Government officials are addressed as 'Excellency' or 'Excelencia'.
- Greetings are very important in Angola so always spend time during the greeting process. Initial introductions in Angolan business are formal.
- Handshakes are generally exchanged before and after business meetings, but the grip is generally softer than those used in the Western world.
- Business attire tends to be casual in Angola. Men usually wear lightweight suits and women often wear long skirts. Dress well as it shows respect to your Angolan counterparts.
- Initial meetings are about establishing personal rapport and developing mutual trust, two vital elements in Angolan business culture. At this stage, judgments are made before any further business negotiations are conducted. Relationship building and networking are paramount to secure long term business success in Angola.
- Knowledge of Portuguese is an advantage and people generally don't speak English outside of the oil industry. If you do not have a proficient knowledge of Portuguese it is wise to bring an interpreter to meetings.

Angolan Business Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)

- ✓ DO arrive on time to meetings, but as a general rule, do not expect your Angolan counterparts to do so. For Angolans, arriving ten to fifteen minutes after the scheduled time is common.
- ✓ DO avoid discussing business during social functions. Angolans tend to strictly separate business from their social life.
- ✓ DO shake hands with your Angolan business colleagues in the beginning and the end of a meeting. This is an essential part of developing trust.
- ✗ DON'T take pictures of government buildings as it may look suspicious and lead to interrogation and imprisonment.
- ✗ DON'T rush through the greeting process as it is used to get to know the counterpart and to exchange courtesies.

- ✱ DON'T be surprised if your Angolan business colleagues ask what may seem to be personal questions about your way of life after a relatively brief period of time. Characteristically, Angolans tend to be warm and friendly people.

Angola Culture Quiz - True or False

1. When having a conversation, Angolians try to look straight in the eyes of their interlocutor.
2. Angolan funerals are very important events and are often associated with many rituals.
3. When invited to a Angolan's home, it is good practice to take a gift of flowers, or chocolates for the host.
4. One of the most common ways to display one's status in Angolan culture is to organise lavish parties for large groups of people.
5. One Angolan tradition involves throwing fruits and cooked dishes into water.

Angola Culture Quiz - Answers

1. False. In most cases, Angolans avoid direct eye contact as they believe this will make the other feel scrutinised and possible ruin the natural flow of conversation.
2. True. Many Angolans fear the restless spirit of the deceased.
3. True. A small token such as this is often appreciated.
4. True. Angolans appreciate parties and events where they can meet people. They also like the treats and entertainments provided.
5. True. Iseland festival is one of most admired holidays in Angola. People throw food into the water and offer prayers which they believe will protect the Isle of Luanda from sinking and prevent people from drowning.

Author: Christina Langhans, BBA, MA Intercultural Communication

* Source: CIA World Factbook 2008

Contact Details

Communicaid
Mitre House
12-14 Mitre Street
London
EC3A 5BU

Tel: +44 (0)20 3370 8580

Fax: +44 (0)20 3370 8501

E: info@communicaid.com

W: www.communicaid.com