

Doing Business in Jordan | Jordanian Social and Business

A Jordanian Culture Overview

Official name – Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

Population – 6,342,948*

Official Language – Arabic

Currency – Jordanian dinars (JOD)

Capital city – Amman

GDP – purchasing power parity \$30.76 billion *

GDP Per Capita - purchasing power parity \$5,000*



Overview

Jordan is a beautiful country featuring deserts, the ancient city of Petra, the fertile Jordan valley and the Red Sea. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a predominantly Muslim country, however, many Jordanians are of different origins, religions and ethnic background. Jordan is home to several cultural minorities including a large group of Palestinian refugees and Nomadic Bedouin tribes. Since the inauguration of King Abdullah II in 1999, his economic modernisations and reforms have increased foreign investment. A sound knowledge of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and of its cultural particularities is essential for a successful experience living or working in Jordan.

Jordanian Culture – Key Concepts and Values

Islam – Islamic values and laws are an integral part of Jordanian society. Approximately 90% of Jordan's population adheres to the Sunni branch of Islam. Their strict Islamic beliefs mean that Jordanians tend to be rule-abiding, family-oriented and hospitable. These customs and social duties also infiltrate the Jordanian business world and affect the way Jordanians handle business dealings.

Family – The family is the most important unit in Jordanian society. The extended patriarchal family unit is the centre of all social and political activity and shares a close relationship. The patriarch is often called sheikh whose influence is based on ancestry, size and wealth of the family. Supporting another family member is a source of pride and honour.

Hospitality – Jordanians are known for their generous hospitality. The social acts of visiting and entertaining play a significant role in Jordanian life. Invitations for dinner or other social activities at Jordanians' homes are common and should be accepted. Coffee or tea is usually offered even during a short visit.

Doing Business in Jordan

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a relatively young nation with ancient roots. Recent reforms, liberalisations and privatisations by the government have helped to stabilise Jordan's economy, strengthen its global position and increase its attractiveness for foreign investment through the membership in the WTO and trade agreements with the US and the EU. King Abdullah II's extensive transformation programme has dealt with the problems of poverty and unemployment and successfully raised the living standards of Jordanians.

Today, Jordan is among the world's top three potash exporters and its tourism sector is growing at a steady rate. For those wishing to do business with Jordan, an understanding of Jordanian etiquette and the personal manner in which business is conducted is essential to success.

Jordan Business Part 1 – Working in Jordan (Pre-departure)

- **Working practices in Jordan**
 - The concept of time in Jordan is considerably different to that of many Western cultures. Jordanians put more focus on people and relationships than on schedules. Therefore, deadlines and punctuality are not necessarily a priority for Jordanians. Patience is valued and extra time in your schedule can help business relationships in Jordan.
 - Generally speaking, business appointments in Jordan are necessary. Appointments should be scheduled in accordance with the five daily prayer times and the religious holidays of Ramadan and Hajj.
 - It is customary to make appointments for times of day rather than precise hours as the relaxed and hospitable nature of Jordanians business culture may cause delays in schedule.
 - In Jordan, Friday is the weekly holiday. Shops, banks and business are also usually closed on Saturdays. Business hours are generally from 8:30am to 1:00pm and 3:30 to 6:30. Be aware that hours vary during the month of Ramadan.
- **Structure and hierarchy in Jordanian companies**
 - Jordanian organisations are characterised by strict hierarchy and rigid structures. Those with the most authority are expected to issue complete and specific directives to others.
 - Age plays a significant part in Jordanian culture so you should always show greater respect to elders.
 - When first entering a room, or greeting your Jordanian counterparts for the first time, you should shake hands with the most senior person first.
- **Working relationships in Jordan**
 - Developing a social relationship with your Jordanian counterparts is paramount for successful business in Jordan. Show them that they are not only a pure business contact but that you are also interested in them as an individual.
 - Respect and friendship are values that are held very highly in Arab cultures. In a business setting, favours based on mutual benefit and trust are ways of enhancing these cultural values.
 - Conflicts in the workplace are usually addressed privately in order to avoid public embarrassment and loss of face.

- Feelings and affection are generally not openly expressed. However, when feelings are expressed in public, it is usually anger more than affection. In fact, any open display of affection between genders is strictly unacceptable.

Jordan Business Part 2 – Doing Business in Jordan

o Business practices in Jordan

- The customary greeting is “As-salam alaikum,” (peace be upon you) to which the reply is “Wa alaikum as-salam,” (and upon you be peace).
- When entering a meeting, general introductions will begin with a handshake. You should greet each of your Jordanian counterparts individually, making your way around the room in an anti-clockwise direction. Men should avoid shaking hands with a woman unless they offer it first.
- It is important to maintain eye contact with your Jordanian counterparts. Women do not tend to make direct eye contact with unknown men in order to avoid unwanted attention.
- Initial business meetings are often a way to become acquainted with your prospective counterparts. They are generally long in duration and discussions are conducted at a leisurely pace over tea and coffee. It is considered impolite to jump right into business.
- Topics such as family or other areas that are not work related are appropriate to discuss while initiating business meetings. Time should be allocated for such business meetings, as they are an essential part of Jordanian business culture.
- Jordanians dress very conservatively and professionally for work. For men, conservative business suits are recommended. Women are required to wear high necklines, sleeves at least to the elbow, and preferably long skirts below the knee.

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

- ✓ DO avoid discussing topics such as politics or Israel unless you are familiar with Jordanian politics. Although it is one of the favourite conversation topics in Jordan, you might offend your Jordanian counterparts.
- ✓ DO learn how to speak a few Arabic phrases as it shows respect to your Jordanian counterparts.
- ✓ DO accept personal invitations to your Jordanian counterpart’s home as such social gatherings are used to intensify personal relationships which will strengthen work relationships.
- ✗ DON’T show the soles of your feet as this is considered to be very offensive in Islamic cultures.

- * DON'T rush your Jordanian counterparts during business negotiations. Communications occur at a slower pace in Jordan and patience is often necessary.
- * DON'T inquire directly about your Jordanian counterpart's female family members as it is considered rude and Jordanians might suspect bad intentions behind it.

Jordanian Culture Quiz – True or False

1. It is not uncommon for men to walk hand in hand in public.
2. Jordanian women are encouraged to stay at home and in general do not receive higher education.
3. Jordan has a compulsory military service for young men.
4. Jordanians traditionally use the right hand for all public functions – including shaking hands, eating, drinking and passing objects to another person.
5. In Jordan, coffee is served even during the shortest visit.

Jordanian Cultural Quiz – Answers

1. True. This is purely a sign of friendship.
2. False. Jordanian women are often educated and are encouraged to pursue a career.
3. False. Jordan is the only Arab country which does not have compulsory military service.
4. True. According to Islam, the left hand is considered unclean and reserved for personal hygiene.
5. True. Hospitality is an important part of Jordanian culture.

* Source: CIA World Factbook 2009

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