

## Doing Business in Morocco | Moroccan Social and Business Culture

### A Moroccan Overview

#### Fact File

- o **Official name** – Kingdom of Morocco
- o **Population** – 34,343,219\*
- o **Official languages** – Arabic
- o **Currency** – Moroccan Dirham (MAD)
- o **Capital city** – Rabat
- o **GDP** – purchasing power parity \$125.3 billion\*
- o **GDP per capita** - purchasing power parity \$4,100



#### Overview

Situated in Northern Africa, Morocco has a rich colonial history which can still be seen in clay buildings and bustling city squares as well as in various European and Arabic influences apparent in the architecture and way of life. Arab heritage has been fused with Spanish and French influences to form modern-day Moroccan culture. Each culture has left an impression on the architecture, designs, languages and atmosphere of the nation. Understanding this balance of cultural elements as well as modern day Moroccan business practices is essential for anyone doing business in Morocco.

#### Moroccan Culture – Key Concepts and Values

**Respect** – Moroccans have a strong belief that you should always respect yourself, your elders and your superiors. Moroccans are considerate to everyone they meet and expect the same in return. Courtesy is extended to all and it is never acceptable to be rude.

**Personal Relationships** – Family is placed before the individual and is a key component of Moroccan culture. Moroccans highly value long-term personal relationships so close friends are often considered family. Trust and friendship play important roles in Moroccan social and business culture.

**Honour** – Honour is extremely important to Moroccans. Dignity and self-worth are especially important so Moroccan's take notice of how others perceive them. Shame is to be avoided at all costs, so Moroccans will often do as much as possible to win the respect of others and to avoid arguments and confrontation. Moroccans are conscious of their reputation and will do whatever it takes to ensure it is not damaged and to avoid shaming their family.

**Religion** – Islam unifies Morocco as the vast majority of Moroccans are Sunni Muslims.

Religion plays a huge part in day-to-day life as well as in Moroccan business culture.

Businesses usually close on Friday afternoons to allow time for prayer and negotiations are rarely conducted during the month of Ramadan.

## Doing Business in Morocco

After a series of dynasties, sultans and conquering armies, Morocco achieved its independence from France in 1956. Since then, Morocco has been a shining example of political and economic reform. This North African nation offers numerous opportunities for Middle Eastern trade in addition to easy access to Europe. Low inflation and labour costs have contributed to the growing economy, and its prime location and thriving manufacturing sectors have attracted foreign investors since the 1990s. With trade agreements with both the US and the EU, Morocco holds incredible potential for any business looking to expand. Though still dependent on agriculture, several sectors of the Moroccan economy have been privatised, fostering economic growth and expansion. Those doing business in Morocco must first understand Moroccan business culture in order to succeed.

### Morocco & Moroccan Business Culture Part 1 - Working in Morocco (Pre-departure)

- **Moroccan working practices**
  - Due to European influence, business is almost always conducted in French. However, some companies prefer to use Arabic or English as their standard language. Always check before attending meetings to ensure you have an interpreter if necessary.
  - Most companies are closed from 11:00 to 3:00pm on Fridays for prayer. It is also important to avoid scheduling important meetings during Ramadan, an important Islamic holiday.
  - Most Moroccans work from Monday through Friday but it is always advised that you check to make sure exactly when your Moroccan business partners will be working.
  - It usually takes time to reach work-related decisions. Moroccans dislike being rushed and may arrive thirty minutes to an hour late for meetings. However, foreign visitors are expected to be punctual.
- **Structure and hierarchy in Moroccan companies**
  - Authority is always respected, however bosses will typically consult the group before making a decision.
  - Decisions require the time and approval of many directors due to the bureaucratic nature of most Moroccan companies.
  - Moroccans are generally more quiet and reserved around their superiors and will not be upfront or direct with those above them. However when around people of the same status, they may have lively debates and speak over each other.
- **Working relationships in Morocco**
  - Moroccans are not straightforward communicators and will often avoid direct confrontation in business. Moroccans prefer to express excitement or dislike with facial expressions rather than with words.

- Moroccans tend to look for long-term business relations and prefer working with familiar people. It is therefore important to get to know your counterparts on an individual basis and to form stable relationships with those you meet.
- Having a network of contacts is extremely important in Moroccan business culture and will help you reach your business objectives.

## **Morocco & Moroccan Business Culture Part 2 - Doing Business in Morocco**

### **o Business practices in Morocco**

- Many Moroccan business practices have been influenced by the French and are therefore somewhat formal. Moroccans require a certain amount of formality in all procedures and negotiations and often view informality as a sign of respect.
- The exchanging of business cards is an informal process in Morocco, however make sure that one side is translated in to French and Arabic.
- A handshake is required upon meeting new colleagues. Familiar friends may be greeted with an embrace or kiss. Be aware that when meeting female Muslim colleagues, men should wait for them to extend their hand before shaking it.

### **Business Etiquette (Do's and Don'ts)**

- ✓ DO greet everyone formally and do not use first names unless you are given permission. Moroccans place a lot of emphasis on formality, especially in business, so it is important to respect everyone you meet.
- ✓ DO take time to establish relationships with Moroccans. Showing an interest and effort to get to know Moroccans that you meet will improve their perception of you. Moroccans will show you the same attention and interest as networking is popular and essential towards forming personal relationships for requesting and returning favours.
- ✓ DO take time to negotiate as Moroccans don't tend to rush. Rushing a client is looked down upon and can be perceived as aggression.
- ✗ DON'T jump into the subject matter at the beginning of a conversation. It is customary to establish a personal relationship first by asking about their health, family and friends before discussing the business matters at hand. If your Moroccan counterparts are Muslim, avoid asking about female family members.
- ✗ DON'T discuss sensitive subjects such as the King, Islam, women's rights and sex. These subjects should not be brought up unless you know a person extremely well. Moroccans are critical of anyone who seems discerning and do not appreciate foreigners who appear to judge their culture.
- ✗ DON'T directly confront someone, especially in public. Moroccan's are very proud so any public confrontation can be detrimental towards your business relationship with them. It is best to use an intermediary when possible, or someone who knows

them who can discuss the conflict for you. If this is not an option, it is acceptable to meet that person in private but avoid using accusatory words and always remain temperate.

### **Moroccan Culture Quiz – True or False**

1. It is considered rude to bring food to your hosts. This suggests that the host cannot provide enough for you.
2. When eating or passing food, only the right hand should be used.
3. Business dealings that should only take a few hours typically last a day or longer due to Moroccan business culture.
4. Ask permission before taking pictures of Moroccans, as many consider it offensive and may demand compensation for the photo.
5. Moroccans enjoy personal space and would prefer living alone.

### **Moroccan Culture Quiz - Answers**

1. False. It is customary to bring pastries or sweets to show gratitude towards your host.
2. True
3. True.
4. True.
5. False. Most Moroccans abhor the idea of living alone and may invite you into their home if you are travelling by yourself.

\* Source: CIA World Factbook 2008

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