



CULTURAL TIDBITS - For when you come down!

- Good Colombian friends always greet each other with a peck on the cheek – well, it's not exactly a peck, it is more like kissing the air with cheeks lightly together – always the “right” cheek, though! **Greetings** is the area that Colombians find the most offensive if it is forgotten. Greet each person in the room, not with one general “Hi.” Same with saying good-bye.
- Colombians **ask about your health** and family before they talk business.
- Remember, the **person** is more important than the task!
- Colombians may tell you what they **think you want to hear** – whether the request can be completed on time or not.
- **Lunchtime** is more sacred to Colombians, and should not be interrupted for work matters.
- Be careful when **interrupting** a conversation. If you have to do so, start with, “*Perdón, pero...*” or “*Que pena, pero...*”
- Colombians are careful to close **car doors** gently, usually enough that they need to try again because it didn't close completely the first time – that shows respect/care.
- Always lock the **bathroom** door when you go in. Colombians discreetly enter without knocking.
- Giving *detalles*, that is little gifts or notes for special events or for encouragement, is highly valued in Colombia.
- **Presentation** is important. Colombians always wrap gifts or put them in a nice bag. They don't give gifts “as is.” Notes on scrap paper are considered extremely informal by Colombians.
- Colombians never **toss** anything to you. They always hand it to you. Don't throw things on desks or in the copy bin; place them in/on it in an orderly way.
- Be careful about **lending** objects or money. If you are not clear, Colombians may misunderstand and consider them gifts. If you lend something, mention a return date or be willing to forego its return.
- Don't be offended if you are told that you are gaining **weight**. Being well-fed is a sign of good health.
- Be ready to **share** with others whatever food you open/eat in their presence.
- When **eating**, chew calmly with your mouth closed. Never speak with food in your mouth.

- Don't be surprised when someone leaves the room just to **blow their nose**.
- Colombians consider **shoes** (style and cleanliness) very important. They often wipe them when arriving anywhere. **Nail care** is also important, with manicurists quite popular.
- Colombian blue collar workers don't wear their **work clothes** to and from work. They always change at the job site.

Though there's repetition, here's a list of cultural tidbits we share with our Colombian staff for relating to North Americans.

- Personal **space** – North Americans need more space when talking or driving.
- Arrive on time; being **punctual** shows respect.
- Get to the **point** when talking.
- North Americans prefer a clear “No” about possible commitments rather than someone saying “Probably” then not fulfilling expectations.
- For North Americans, work time is not for **catching up** on one's personal life. After work is the time to chat about such things.
- It doesn't bother North Americans to talk about work during **meals**.
- North Americans tend to be more **organized** and like to plan things well in advance, and it bothers them when others don't plan ahead more.
- Many North Americans prefer **written replies**, while many Colombians prefer verbal responses, and don't think it's necessary to answer notes with something written.
- If North Americans pass someone in the hall and don't say, “Hi,” it's usually because they're distracted. When they arrive in the morning, they don't think it's necessary to speak to or **greet** everyone personally.
- North Americans don't tend to show much **affection** in public, but that doesn't mean they value people less.
- North Americans usually don't like it when people say anything about their **weight**, except when they've lost weight, which is generally a compliment.
- North Americans tend to dress more casually/informally even on special occasions.
- During an informal meeting it's not uncommon for North Americans to **multitask** (like grading easy papers or doing handcrafts).
- North Americans wish people were more sensitive to a **loan** being a loan, not a gift, and that it must be returned. If you need to borrow it again, you can ask again.