

## KUWAIT CUSTOMS

### Greetings:

Kuwaitis greet friends of the same sex with kisses on alternate cheeks. For close friends, this gesture is repeated. It is customary to stand for greetings.

A handshake is used in formal circumstances and when meeting someone for the first time. Conservative Kuwaitis do not shake hands with members of the opposite sex outside of their own families.

The most common greeting among Kuwaitis is *As-Salaamu Alaykum* (The peace of *Allah* be upon you), to which the usual reply is *Wa alaykum As-salaam* (And peace be upon you). This is followed by questions such as "How are you?" (*Eshloanak* to a man, *Eshloanich* to a woman). A typical response is *Zain, al-Humdulillah* (Good, thanks be to *Allah*). General inquiries are then made regarding the welfare of the person's family.

### Gestures:

Kuwaiti gestures include shaking the index finger to indicate "no."

Placing the tips of all the fingers together, with the palm facing up, and moving them up and down can mean "wait," "let me finish," impatience, or exasperation. The more the hand moves vertically, the more intense the message.

Traditionally, a man does not maintain eye contact when speaking with a woman, although this practice depends on their degree of familiarity as well as the nature of their conversation. For example, a male customer and a female bank clerk would maintain eye contact.

### Holidays:

Public holidays include New Year's Day (1 Jan.); Kuwait National Day (25 Feb.), which celebrates independence from Britain in 1961; and Kuwait Liberation Day (26 Feb.), which marks the end of the Persian Gulf War in 1991.

Islamic holidays are set according to the lunar calendar. These include the Islamic New Year, the prophet Muhammad's birthday, Muhammad's ascension, *Eid al-Fitr* (a three-day holiday at the end of the holy month of *Ramadan*), and *Eid al-Adha* (the Feast of the Sacrifice, a four-day holiday commemorating Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son).

Though not an official national holiday, *Assura* is observed by Shi'i Muslims, who reenact the suffering of the martyr Hussain, the grandson of Muhammad.