

CAMBODIA CUSTOMS

Greetings:

Whether you are meeting a man or a woman for the first time, you should “som-peah.” This is similar to the **Thai “wai.”** With hands held together, as in prayer, slightly bow your head.

The higher the hands are held and the lower the bow, the greater the degree of respect.

Som-peahs are made during initial introductions, or if people have not seen one another in a long time, but it is not necessary to bow every time you meet a friend or coworker. A simple wave or hello is fine.

Gestures:

To beckon someone, hold your hand palm downwards with the fingers pointing towards the ground and waggle them loosely in a scratching motion. Beckoning with the palm upwards (Western style) is considered rude.

Rotating one or both hands held up in front of the body (similar to the Queen of England’s wave but faster) means “no”, “I don’t want it”, “we’re closed”, etc.

“Yes” does not always mean “yes” and “no” may be substituted for “maybe”, “possibly” or even “yes”. It’s best to pay attention to non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and body language.

When a man speaks to a woman, especially a younger woman, she may avoid making direct eye contact and keep her eyes focused on the ground.