

# Indonesia



## Introduction

With a population of almost 200 million people on 13,667 islands, Indonesia is the world's largest archipelago located between the continents of Asia and Australia, and between the Pacific and the Indian Oceans. Only 35% of the population live in urban areas, but there are more than 30 cities with 100,000+ population. Plus, five cities have a population of over one million. They are Jakarta, Surabaya, Bandung, and Semarang, and are all located on Java. To truly understand the socio-political culture in Indonesia, one needs to understand Java.

Although the population has a significant Malay heritage, it is also diverse with over 300 distinct cultures residing within its borders. With each culture comes a unique language or dialect; however Bahasa Indonesia, the common language of the country, unites everyone. In tourist areas and population centers English is the most commonly spoken second language. Though the large majority of Indonesians follow the Islamic faith (85%), the intensity of their observance for their faith varies due to the large diversity within this nation. Christianity a distant second (10%). One important historic note is the strong sentiment against the Chinese. Keep this in mind and be sensitive to this reality.

## Fun Fact

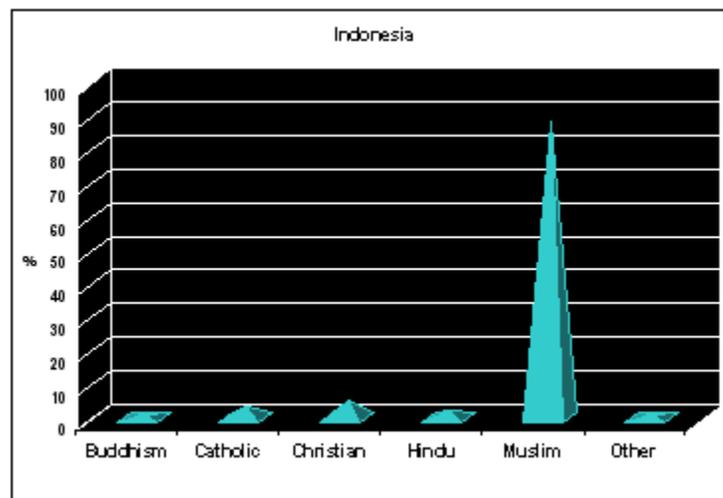
When someone says *yes*, does he or she mean *yes* or *no*. Indonesia is a gracious culture that is polite. Wanting to be agreeable and never wanting to embarrass another, the native language Bahasa Indonesia has 12 words that "say *yes* but really *mean no*. Unless you are fluent in Bahasa Indonesia, using English or another language will not convey the correct message. Even with a correct translation, though the literal translation for these 12 words would be *yes*, the culture requires a polite, agreeable response. Since saying *no* to someone is impolite, don't assume a positive response means you have agreement.

# Geert Hofstede Analysis Indonesia

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The Geert Hofstede analysis for Indonesia has very high power distance with offsetting low individualism. This establishes an authoritarian structure where rank and position are very important. With the majority of the population Islamic, religion and faith enter into decision making on a more subjective basis than in most Western cultures. [More Details](#)

## Religion in Indonesia



\* WORLD FACTBOOK 2002

## Appearance

- An umbrella is an essential wardrobe component in rainy season (September - February).
- High heat and humidity require packing enough clothing to always appear clean & fresh. You may have to change your clothes several times a day to maintain this look.
- Women should wear long-sleeve blouses and skirts that cover the knee.
- Women meeting in a more formal office should wear a suit with hosiery.
- Women are limited to clothing colors that are muted or dark. Leave brightly colored clothing at home.
- Men should wear coat and tie until appropriate to dress more casually. Follow the lead of

those you are meeting with.

- Men generally wear dark slacks, long sleeve and light colored shirt, and tie (no jacket).
- "Lounge suit" requires men to wear a business suit. This term may be included on an invitation.
- Men may find in a very casual business office that a short sleeve shirt and no tie would be appropriate.
- Women must always cover their upper arms when wearing a casual blouse.
- Jeans may be worn for very casual, but never shorts for men or women. Even though the climate is warm and humid, proper attire even for very casual appearance will always dictate your choice of clothing.
- Do not crook your index finger to call someone over. This gesture is offensive.
- Do not put your hands into your pockets when talking with someone.

## **Behavior**

- No physical contact between men and women is made in public, except a possible handshake.
- Be on time for any meetings. The meetings traditionally start late, and your Indonesian business associates will probably arrive late. However, you are expected on time, and should never make any comment about the meeting starting late or any person arriving late.
- Never stand with your back to an elderly person or a high ranking official. As you enter a room be aware of the people who will be in that room with you.
- Always rise when your host/hostess enters the room.
- Leaving food on your plate signifies you are impolite, so eat all the food you are served.
- Only use your right hand for eating, when touching someone, or handling money/papers.
- Talking is impolite while eating dinner. Conversation is reserved for before or after the meal.
- Never show the soles of your feet/shoes or touch anything with your foot.

- Never touch another person's head, this includes a child's head (such as a pat on the head).
- Never eat while walking in public, or chew on a toothpick. Yawning in public is inappropriate (cover your mouth if you must yawn).
- Remove your hat and sunglasses when going indoors.
- Gifts, though small, are frequently given.
- Gifts are not opened when given. This practice shows the recipient is gracious, not greedy.
- Religion/culture dictates specific rules for appropriate gifts. Muslim, Hindus, and the Chinese culture each have rules regarding food, alcohol, and other items. Make sure your gift is not offensive to the person you are giving it to.
- Chinese may politely refuse a gift three times before accepting it. When the gift is accepted, tell the recipient how happy you are with his or her acceptance.
- Do not give gifts of alcohol or pork. This would also include perfume since it is made with alcohol, and any leather product made from pigskin (Muslim).
- Do not give gifts containing beef or items made of cowhide (Hindu).
- Do not give gifts or pictures that show dogs. They are considered unclean.
- On Chinese New Year, give children and people you frequently deal with, who are not government employees, a gift of money. The money must be an even number of new bills, and presented in a red envelope (Chinese).
- Do not give a knife, scissors, clock, handkerchief, or straw sandals (Chinese).
- Do not give a gift that numbers four or shows a crane or stork. In selecting the gift and the gift wrapping paper stay away from the colors white, black, or blue (Chinese).
- A gift of an umbrella means you do not want to see that person again (Chinese).

## **Communications**

- Shake hands upon greeting and leaving, and always using your right hand. The handshake is limp and lasts 10-15 seconds.
- For religious reasons (Muslim and Hindu) men and women do not touch in public in this

culture.

- Women do not offer a handshake to an Indonesian man. However, should a man extend his hand, always shake hands. Some Indonesian men may follow western business rules in a business setting.
- Men do not offer a handshake to an Indonesian woman. Reciprocate, however, if she initiates.
- Indonesian Chinese may bow, or combine a bow with a handshake.
- Greetings are not to be rushed. They carry importance and formality.
- Presenting your business card follows introductions. A person's name is very important. Develop a habit of paying close attention during introduction.
- Present a business card to each person you are meeting. Offer your card with the printing positioned so the recipient can read it. Your right hand holds the card, with your left hand supporting your right wrist. Your card will be received with both hands.
- Time is taken to *carefully read* the card.
- When presented another person's business card, follow this same ritual.
- Never write on a business card.
- Never carry your business cards, or place another person's business card in a back pocket.
- Print your business cards in English, with the reverse side printed in Indonesian.
- Address each person using his/her title plus full name. A title may be an honorific title or an academic title. Rank and status is very important in this culture.
- One important honorific title is for Muslims who have made a pilgrimage to Mecca. *Haji* is the title for a man, *Hajjah* is for a woman.
- Mr., Madam, Mrs. or Miss is used if a person does not have a title. A man is addressed as *Pak* (Mr.) or *Bapak*(Sir) . A lady is addressed as *Ibu*.
- People are normally called by their first name, as in Mr. Robert or Miss Susan, rather than using their last name.

- Married Chinese women keep their maiden name.
- *Selamat* means peace and is a traditional greeting.
- "Yes, but" means *no* when someone is speaking to you.
- Never allow your voice to get loud, whether in anger or joy.
- Expressing anger in public through tone of voice, loudness, or body language is always inappropriate.
- Do not use red ink when writing, or having printing done (Chinese).