**The Dos and Don’ts of Gift-Giving Around the World**

If you think the art of giving gifts is tricky at home, try making it work abroad. While you must carefully choose the item itself, the gift’s wrapping is surprisingly important, too, as is the timing. In fact, in many cultures, gift-giving is like a traditional dance—you have to do the steps in order, in time to the music, and without stepping on anyone’s toes for it to be a good experience for everyone involved.

So whether you’re at a business meeting in Seoul or visiting a friend’s home in a small village in Provence, there are destination-specific guidelines you can (and probably should) follow to offer and receive gifts without causing offense. Here are some traditions to be aware of on your travels.

**Insist a little**

In many countries in East Asia, when offering a gift, you should expect to be refused once, twice, or even three times. This is done to avoid seeming greedy or impatient. If you’re being offered a gift in one of these places and want to be polite, you’re well advised to do the same. Also, when the person finally accepts, you’re expected to thank them.

**Hand it over with care**

In Asia and the Middle East, how you handle gifts is very important. In India and the Middle East, the left hand is considered unclean so use your right hand to give and receive gifts (unless they’re so heavy two hands are required). In East Asia (China, Thailand, Vietnam), always offer or accept a gift with both hands, palms up.

**Give gifts as a thank-you**

Throughout Asia, gifts are given to show gratitude after receiving a gift and as a thank-you for hospitality. In Russia, thank-you cards are thought of as impractical; send a small gift to your hosts after a dinner or overnight stay instead.

**Leave sharp objects at home**  
 In more countries than you might imagine, scissors, knives, and basically anything pointy or sharp represents the severing of ties and relationships—a gesture you’d probably prefer to avoid if you’ve gone to the trouble of buying and wrapping a present.

**Wrap it up**

Etiquette experts from around the world agree that gifts should always be wrapped. That said, the symbolism of colors varies from country to country. Avoid white, black, and blue gift wrap throughout Asia, as they’re associated with mourning. And while yellow paper is cheerful and appropriate for celebratory gifts in India, in China it’s covered in black writing and used exclusively for gifts to the dead. In South America, black and purple are eschewed because of their association with death and religious ceremonies, and in Italy purple is simply considered unlucky. To avoid any of these faux pas, have gifts wrapped by a pro in your destination. Color, folds, and ribbons aren’t just an important element of presentation—in many cultures they’re symbolic and the wrong wrapping could send the wrong message.