



Project Britain

Your Guide to British Life, Culture and Customs

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NB. Men should never wear hats inside buildings

Time

British people place considerable value on punctuality. If you agree to meet friends at three o'clock, you can bet that they'll be there just after three. Since Britons are so time conscious, the pace of life may seem very rushed. In Britain, people make great effort to arrive on time. It is often considered impolite to arrive even a few minutes late. If you are unable to keep an appointment, it is expected that you call the person you are meeting. Some general tips follow.



You should arrive:

* At the exact time specified – for dinner, lunch, or appointments with professors, doctors, and other professionals.

* Any time during the hours specified for teas, receptions, and cocktail parties.

* A few minutes early: for public meetings, plays, concerts, movies, sporting events, classes, church services, and weddings.

If you are invited to someone's house for dinner at half past seven, they will expect you to be there on the dot. An invitation might state "7.30 for 8", in which case you should arrive no later than 7.50. However, if an invitation says "sharp", you must arrive in plenty of time.

Invitations

"Drop in anytime" and "come see me soon" are idioms often used in social settings but seldom meant to be taken literally. It is wise to telephone before visiting someone at home. If you receive a written invitation to an event that says "RSVP", you should respond to let the person who sent the invitation know whether or not you plan to attend.

Never accept an invitation unless you really plan to go. You may refuse by saying, "Thank you for inviting me, but I will not be able to come." If, after accepting, you are unable to attend, be sure to tell those expecting you as far in advance as possible that you will not be there.

Although it is not necessarily expected that you give a gift to your host, it is considered polite to do so, especially if you have been invited for a meal. Flowers, chocolate, or a small gift are all appropriate. A thank-you note or telephone call after the visit is also considered polite and is an appropriate means to express your appreciation for the invitation.

Dress

Everyday dress is appropriate for most visits to peoples' homes. You may want to dress more formally when attending a holiday dinner or cultural event, such as a concert or theatre performance.

Introduction and Greeting

It is proper to shake hands with everyone to whom you are introduced, both men and women. An appropriate response to an introduction is "Pleased to meet you". If you want to introduce yourself to someone, extend you hand for a handshake and say "Hello, I am....". Hugging is only for friends.

Dining

When you accept a dinner invitation, tell your host if you have any dietary restrictions. He or she will want to plan a meal that you can enjoy. The evening meal is the main meal of the day in most parts of Britain.

Food may be served in one of several ways: "family style," by passing the serving plates from one to another around the dining table; "buffet style," with guests serving themselves at the buffet; and "serving style," with the host filling each plate and passing it to each person. Guests usually wait until everyone at their table has been served before they begin to eat. Food is eaten with a knife and fork and dessert with a spoon and fork.

[Click here for more Eating Manners](#)

Also visit our page on [Dos and Don'ts in Britain](#)

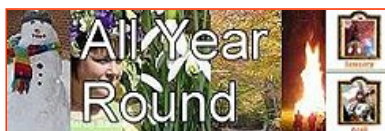
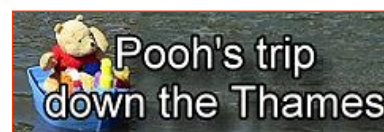
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