

MEETING AND GREETING IN POLAND

Every culture has customs that come into play when meeting new people and Poland is no exception. First contact is by nature something that makes most of us feel awkward, you don't actually know the person and they don't know you yet either...



But these initial encounters are the hurdle that we all need to get over in order to develop any sort of interpersonal relationship, so here are some tips on making first impressions a positive experience in Poland.

Greeting Strangers

- Politeness in Poland dictates that you acknowledge a person's presence by greeting them, even if you are not otherwise going to interact with them.
- This applies to your colleagues and academic staff but also canteen and cleaning staff, porters and security staff, shop assistants in a small shop or a neighbor in the stairwell.
- A smile or a nod of the head can suffice for a greeting in passing – just be aware that not acknowledging someone's presence at all is likely to come across as arrogance rather than shyness.

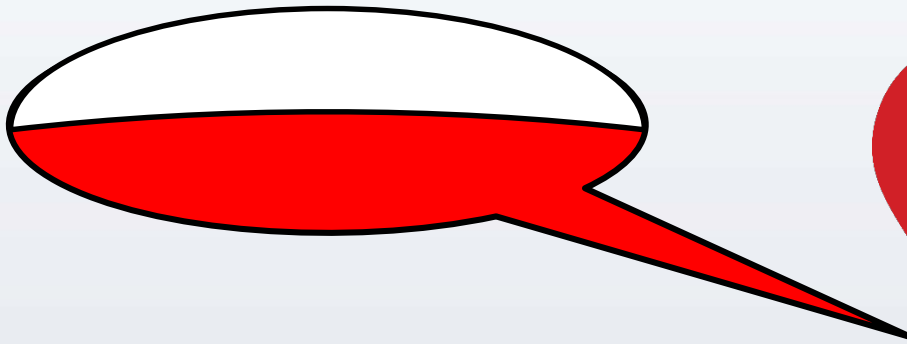
A handshake is the most common form of greeting amongst colleagues in Poland.

Cheek-kissing (women with women, men with women) three times is traditionally the standard greeting amongst friends and family in Poland.

However, a quick peck on the cheek amongst friends, has replaced cheek-kissing as the most typical greeting for young people.

As in other countries prone to snow and mud, it may not be very pleasant for your host if you wear your outdoor shoes in their apartment.

When invited into someone's home, offer to remove your outdoor shoes – many Poles have guest slippers on hand for visitors for exactly such occasions, many will tell you to keep your shoes on, but will still appreciate the gesture.



Other international students recommend that by learning a few standard greetings in Polish you'll find you make a much better first impression and are likely to be received more warmly.

Polish Pronunciation Guide

| POLISH | PRONUNCIATION (as if reading English) | MEANING |
|----------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| dzień dobry | <i>dzean dob-ri</i> | hello, good day |
| dobry wieczór | <i>dob-ri vye-ch-oo-r</i> | hello, good evening |
| do widzenia | <i>do vidz-en-ya</i> | goodbye, au revoir |
| dziękuję | <i>dzin-ku-ye</i> | thank you |
| proszę | <i>pro-she</i> | please, you're welcome |
| czy to miejsce jest wolne? | <i>chi to myej-tse yest vol-ne?</i> | is this seat/place free? |

On Public Transport

- In Warsaw direct eye contact in public, including public transport, is common. For many people from large cities in other countries this is a very unusual feeling of being stared at and may feel quite aggressive.
- Where available, people will tend to take up distanced seats from other passengers.
- Fit, able-bodied young people are expected to give up their seat for the elderly, disabled and help those travelling with young children.
- Strangers rarely chat to each other on public transport.
- Talking loudly on public transport (including on mobile phones) is generally frowned upon.

The Poles have a reputation for hand-kissing as an act of chivalry and to "charm the ladies". You will still see celebrities and politicians on TV kissing ladies on the hand. However, this is certainly no longer standard among younger generations and in many situations would not be well received by the woman being kissed.



Customs, Rituals and Superstitions

Although many young people no longer observe them, there are some old folk traditions still in use in modern-day Poland, particularly customs relating to hosting guests and visitors.

An old custom still popular today states that you should not greet someone (shake hands, hug or kiss) over the threshold, as this will cause enmity between the participants.



A purse on the floor is money out the door!

In accordance with this old superstition many people will place their handbags on a chair rather than leave them on the floor... So if you see a bag taking up a whole seat it doesn't actually mean that seat is already taken, but don't just move the bag on to the floor as you could be messing with someone else's fortune!

Making a First Impression at University

Academic events and ceremonies in Poland are considered formal occasions – be aware that for official university events, including oral examinations, you would be expected to dress smartly.

What's in a name?

In Polish universities "profesor" may also be used as a term of address for any lecturer regardless of their actual academic title.

Departing as Friends

Did you know?

In German the expression "**einen Polnischen Abgang machen**" (meaning: "to make a Polish departure") is used to mean *to leave without saying goodbye*, i.e. just disappear from a party, rather than saying your goodbyes.

Why this is actually called a *Polish departure* in German remains a mystery, considering that Poles are in fact quite ritualistic about taking their leave, and frequently joke that departing guests can take what seems like an eternity to finally leave the premises.

Amusingly enough, in Polish departing a gathering without taking your leave properly is actually referred to as "**wyść po angielsku**" (meaning: "to exit in English")!



One for the road!

At a party with alcohol you might be persuaded to drink a rozchodniaczek ("roz-hod-nya-chek"), a last ritual shot with the host before leaving.

