The manners minefield

It’s very unlikely that anyone reading this will lack a basic knowledge of what ways of speaking and behaving are considered polite in their local culture, and what ways are considered rude. Almost everyone, in other words, has at least some idea of what good and bad manners consist of.

Needless to say, different cultures have different ideas about manners. Behaviour considered polite in one culture might appear strange in another, while actions that are innocuous in one country might cause offence elsewhere.

Even though globalisation is reducing cultural differences, it is still quite possible when travelling abroad that our manners will stick out like a sore thumb.

There are countless examples. Many westerners don’t know that in parts of the Middle and Far East it is rude to point your feet (especially the soles) at another person. Giving tips (e.g. to waiters or bar staff) is absolutely normal in many parts of the world but seen almost as an insult in parts of the Far East. If you went to dinner at someone’s house and then belched openly after the meal, hosts in some parts of the world – such as China – might take it as a friendly compliment on the quality of their cooking, but a western host might be shocked.

Then there’s the tricky issue of physical contact between two people meeting for the first time. Many westerners might think they can never go wrong with a simple handshake, offered equally to a man or a woman – but they’d be mistaken. And even in situations where handshakes are acceptable, there could still be problems: a firm handshake is generally seen as positive in Britain and the United States, for example, but can seem aggressive in some Asian countries.

Beyond the handshake, of course, lie hugs and kisses – a minefield of possible embarrassment and misunderstanding. Suffice to say people in different parts of the world have very different expectations about the amount of physical contact when two people greet each other, and the specific forms it will take. Often, of course, it depends on whether the two people are of the same or different genders.

The obvious advice for travellers is to try to be respectful, and for people receiving foreign visitors to be prepared to make allowances for their behaviour. Also, a sense of humour will always be very helpful, making it possible to laugh about some of those moments when differences in manners suddenly become apparent.
The manners minefield

Exercise 1
Here are some simple definitions for words that appear in the text on Worksheet A. Find the words they refer to and fill in the gaps.

1. _ _ _ _ k o _ _ l _ _ _ _ a _ _ _ e t _ u _ _ (phrase): to be very noticeable because of being different
2. in _ _ l _ (noun): something that seems to show a lack of respect for something or someone
3. _ _ d _ (adjective): not polite
4. If you m _ _ _ a _ _ _ f _ _ (phrase) someone’s behaviour, you accept it, even though normally you wouldn’t, because you can understand why they are behaving in that way.
5. a _ _ _ _ ss _ _ _ (adjective): angry, or suggesting that you want to fight or argue
6. m _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ g (noun): a failure to understand someone or something correctly
7. _ _ _ oc _ _ _ s (adjective): not likely to offend or upset anyone
8. If you have a sense of _ _ _ m _ _ _ (noun) you are able to realise when something is funny and to laugh at funny situations.
9. f _ _ _ m (adjective): strong
10. We can say _ _ ff _ _ _ to _ _ y (phrase) when what we are about to say is enough to express our main idea. We could say more, but we’re not going to.
11. _ _ g (noun): the action of putting your arms round someone to show your love or friendship
12. _ _ _ e (noun): the bottom part of your foot
13. _ _ l _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ ion (noun): the idea that the world is developing a single economy and culture as a result of new communications and technology
14. _ _ _ _ ch (verb): to let air from your stomach come out through your mouth (often in a noisy way)
15. g _ _ _ _ r (noun) sex; the state of being either male or female
Exercise 2
The text from Worksheet A has been copied below, but contains some mistakes. Twenty of the words in bold are incorrect, and five are correct. Decide which are incorrect, and correct them.

It’s very unlikely that anyone reading this will lack a basic knowledge of what ways of speaking and behaving are considered polite in their local culture, and what ways are considered rude. Almost everyone, in other words, has at least some idea of what good and bad manners consist (1) in.

Needless to say, different cultures have different ideas about manners. Behaviour considered polite in one culture might appear strange in another, while actions that are innocuous in one country might cause (2) offend elsewhere.
Even though (3) worldisation is reducing cultural differences, it is still quite possible when travelling (4) abroad that our manners will stick out like a sore (5) tub.
There are (6) countess examples. Many westerners don’t know that in parts of the (7) Middle and Far East it is rude to point your feet (especially the (8) souls) at another person. Giving (9) taps (e.g. to waiters or bar staff) is absolutely normal in many parts of the world but seen almost as an insult in parts of the Far East. If you went to dinner at someone’s house and then belched openly after the meal, (10) hots in some parts of the world – such as China – might take it as a friendly (11) cumpriment on the quality of their cooking, but a western host might be shocked.
Then there’s the (12) tricky issue of physical contact between two people meeting for the first time. Many westerners might think they can never go wrong with a simple handshake, offered equally to a man or a woman – but they’d be (13) mistaked. And even in situations where handshakes are acceptable, there could still be problems: a (14) farm handshake is generally seen as positive in Britain and the United States, for example, but can seem aggressive in some (15) Asian countries.
(16) Beyon the handshake, of course, lie hugs and kisses – a minefield of possible (17) embarassment and (18) ununderstanding. Suffice to say people in different parts of the world have very different (19) expectats about the amount of physical contact when two people (20) great each other, and the specific (21) fors it will take. Often, of course, it depends (22) on whether the two people are of the same or different genders.
The obvious advice for travellers to try to be (23) respectfull, and for people receiving foreign visitors to be prepared to (24) do allowances for their behaviour. Also, a sense of humour will always be very helpful, making it possible to laugh about some of those moments when differences in manners suddenly become (25) parent.