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CULTURAL ETIQUETTE

Saying Hello in Botswana

By Doug Johnson, February 2009 issue | [Subscribe to the magazine](#)

The quickest way to end a conversation in this southern African country is to start it without a greeting. "There is nothing more offensive than a foreigner who asks for something without first exchanging pleasantries," says Hannah Maniki, a culture instructor in the capital, Gaborone. Start with hello, which is "*dumela rra*" (doo-meh-lah rah) to a man and "*dumela mma*" (doo-meh-lah mah) to a woman. Follow that with a handshake:

Step 1 Extend your right hand and place your left under your right elbow, as if you were supporting an injured arm. Lightly clasp hands as you would in the U.S.

Step 2 Change your grip so your thumb interlocks with the other person's—almost like an arm wrestling pose at waist level. Keep your left hand beneath your right elbow.

Step 3 Return to the handshaking position and say "*Le kae?*" (lay ky), which means "How are you?" in Setswana, the country's main language.



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Saying hello in Botswana (Illustration by Kate Francis)

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