# Uk tourists warned against using the 'fig sign' in Turkey, Greece and Italy amid legal risks



As UK holidaymakers flock to Turkey, Greece, and Italy this summer, authorities in these countries are issuing strong warnings regarding the use of certain hand gestures, particularly the so-called "fig sign." This gesture, which involves placing the thumb between the index and middle fingers, is not merely a benign or playful expression. Rather, it is deeply embedded in cultural contexts that could lead to severe legal repercussions for those who fail to recognise its meanings.

In Turkey, the fig sign is widely regarded as an obscene gesture, analogous to showing a middle finger. Turkish law reinforces this perception, with Article 125 of the Penal Code stipulating that insulting gestures in public can attract criminal prosecution. Consequently, offenders could find themselves facing significant penalties. Similarly, both Greece and Italy harbour stringent laws that punish such gestures, underscoring a broader cultural sensitivity to perceived insults.

Cautionary guidance around this gesture is critical. As Ski Vertigo—a travel authority—warned, misunderstandings can rapidly escalate. “Even minor confrontations can escalate quickly in Turkey if the wrong gesture is used,” they noted, emphasising that local law enforcement is inclined to intervene at the slightest hint of insult. This situation has cultivated a tense atmosphere where gestures and body language are notably scrutinised.

The fig sign's historical roots run deep. One Reddit user elaborated that it has been used as a mild insult since ancient Roman times, suggesting its cultural relevance has persisted through various civilisations. This user pointed out that, in Turkish, the sign can convey multiple layers of insult, aligning with phrases like "my answer is obvious you dumbass." Such interpretations illustrate the complexity and nuance of communicating in different cultural frameworks.

Even beyond the Mediterranean, similar sentiments about hand gestures prevail. Various studies and articles highlight how gestures like the fig sign can transform into offensive symbols depending on geographical context. In some cultures, it may signify female genitalia or be used to avert the evil eye, exemplifying how meanings can shift dramatically across borders.

Recent incidents in the realm of sports have also highlighted the ramifications of hand gestures in Turkey. Notable instances include UEFA's sanctions against Turkish player Merih Demiral for making a controversial gesture linked to a nationalistic group, which sparked diplomatic tension. Such events demonstrate that the impact of gestures can extend beyond personal interactions, influencing international relations and public perception.

As visitors prepare for their travels, understanding these cultural nuances becomes essential. Errant use of gestures may appear trivial to an outsider but can bear significant consequences. In navigating a rich tapestry of customs and societal norms, UK tourists must remain aware and sensitive to local practices, particularly when it comes to seemingly innocuous hand signals. Being informed and respectful is not just advisable; it is essential for a trouble-free holiday experience in these culturally vibrant nations.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016), [[2]](https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016), [[2]](https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016), [[5]](https://www.foxnews.com/travel/hand-gestures-that-can-be-offensive-around-the-world)
* Paragraph 4 – [[5]](https://www.foxnews.com/travel/hand-gestures-that-can-be-offensive-around-the-world), [[6]](https://www.rd.com/article/common-hand-gestures-rude-in-other-countries/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[3]](https://www.apnews.com/article/turkey-demiral-ban-gesture-euro-2024-4bd4f56a5bdd2a66d73f9f07f8f94cce), [[4]](https://www.apnews.com/uefa-fines-turkey-reprimands-players-for-military-salutes-4959b32088e63860878be29c6203ee6a)
* Paragraph 6 – [[2]](https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016), [[7]](https://www.shermanstravel.com/advice/18-gestures-that-can-cause-offense-around-the-world/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.examinerlive.co.uk/news/cost-of-living/brits-turkey-greece-italy-facing-31738016> - An article discussing how Turkey, Greece, and Italy are imposing strict penalties for offensive hand gestures, particularly the 'fig sign', urging UK holidaymakers to be cautious to avoid legal issues. The 'fig sign' involves placing the thumb between the index and middle fingers, resembling a fig, and is considered offensive in these countries. In Turkey, it's seen as an obscene gesture equivalent to showing the middle finger and can lead to prosecution under Article 125 of the Turkish Penal Code. Similar laws exist in Italy and Greece, where such gestures are also punishable. The article includes insights from Reddit users and mentions the gesture's historical use since ancient Rome.
3. <https://www.apnews.com/article/turkey-demiral-ban-gesture-euro-2024-4bd4f56a5bdd2a66d73f9f07f8f94cce> - A report on UEFA's two-game ban of Turkey's Merih Demiral for making a controversial hand gesture at Euro 2024. After scoring a goal, Demiral displayed a sign associated with the Turkish ultra-nationalist group Ulku Ocaklari, known as the Gray Wolves. The gesture led to diplomatic tensions between Turkey and Germany. UEFA stated that the ban was for failing to comply with general principles of conduct and bringing the sport into disrepute. Turkish officials denounced the decision, calling it politically motivated, while Demiral claimed it was an innocent expression of national pride.
4. <https://www.apnews.com/uefa-fines-turkey-reprimands-players-for-military-salutes-4959b32088e63860878be29c6203ee6a> - An article detailing UEFA's fines and reprimands for Turkey's soccer federation and over 20 players for making military salutes during games in October, coinciding with Turkey's offensive in Syria. UEFA deemed the gestures inappropriate given the political context, stating they violated rules prohibiting political statements in stadiums. The Turkish federation was fined €50,000, and players, including Hakan Çalhanoğlu and Merih Demiral, were reprimanded. The salutes were made in support of Turkish forces involved in the invasion of Kurdish-held regions in northern Syria.
5. <https://www.foxnews.com/travel/hand-gestures-that-can-be-offensive-around-the-world> - An article highlighting various hand gestures that can be offensive in different cultures. It discusses the 'fig' gesture, where a clenched fist with the thumb between the first and second fingers means 'screw you' in Turkey, Russia, and Indonesia. In some countries, it symbolizes female genitalia. The piece also covers other gestures like the 'chin flick' and the 'moutza', explaining their meanings and the cultural contexts in which they are considered offensive.
6. <https://www.rd.com/article/common-hand-gestures-rude-in-other-countries/> - An article discussing common hand gestures that are considered rude in various countries. It covers the 'fig' gesture, where a clenched fist with the thumb between the first and second fingers means 'screw you' in Turkey, Russia, and Indonesia. In some countries, it symbolizes female genitalia. The piece also discusses other gestures like the 'chin flick' and the 'moutza', explaining their meanings and the cultural contexts in which they are considered offensive.
7. <https://www.shermanstravel.com/advice/18-gestures-that-can-cause-offense-around-the-world/> - An article detailing 18 hand gestures that can cause offense around the world. It includes the 'fig' gesture, where a clenched fist with the thumb between the first and second fingers means 'screw you' in Turkey, Russia, and Indonesia. In some countries, it symbolizes female genitalia. The article also covers other gestures like the 'chin flick' and the 'moutza', explaining their meanings and the cultural contexts in which they are considered offensive.