

Etiquette in the Philippines

Influenced during its history by centuries of Spanish rule and the U.S., and a lively influx of influences from around Japan, China, India, Middle East, and the West, the Philippines has a unique and particularly formal sense of etiquette concerning social functions, filial respect and public behavior.

- Filipinos hold gentlemanly etiquette in high regard. For example, in waiting rooms or on buses, men will surrender their seats to the handicapped, the elderly, pregnant women, and women in general, although this is generally ignored today. To revive this value, one of the urban rail systems has separate coaches for males and females, children, and the elderly.
- Gift giving is important on many occasions such as weddings and birthdays. Coming to a party empty-handed is a faux pas. If a gift is unavailable on short notice, a food item may be brought instead. If invited to a restaurant, do not assume the opportunity to buy the celebrant dinner; bring a gift instead.
- When attending a funeral, avoid wearing loud colors, especially red. Black, white, grays, muted and earth tones are proper colors for funeral attire. Money, flowers or prayer cards are acceptable gifts. This tradition is slowly waning though, and it usually just the immediate family who wear strictly funeral colors. Due to the Philippine heat (and Chinese cultural influence), white is preferred by many.
- Good posture is expected at the dinner table.
- Filipinos place importance on proper introductions. Older people are introduced to younger people first. Men are introduced to women first. Introduce a group to an individual first as the individual is not expected to remember all the names at first introduction. Failing to make the proper introductions can be a faux pas. This is particularly true for children introducing friends or acquaintances to their parents.
- Always acknowledge the presence of older people in the room by shaking their hands. If the age difference is great (such as a grandson and a grandparent), or in some cases a religious authority, ask for their hand and bring it to the forehead (this important gesture is called "*Mano*"). Neither kisses are involved in such a case nor is there any regard for the cleanliness of the hands. The rules on this gesture differ though; it is unusual and awkward for someone to do the "*mano*" gesture to non-relatives or newly made acquaintances.
- Waiters usually only come to take the order, refill drinks and bring the bill. Most will not return to ask if anything else is needed but are very attentive and can be easily summoned. However, except for formal dining establishments, Filipino waiters are not trained to answer questions.
- While splitting bills at restaurants is common among younger people, older adults might consider it a matter of prestige to pay for the bill and will often compete for the honour. Moreover, allowing another to pay the bill without some protest may be a faux pas.
- If someone is buying a meal for someone else, the buyer orders first. For the guest to order something expensive on the menu is considered highly rude.
- Seeming reluctant to socialize, especially at an event to which one is invited, could be considered offensive. It is proper manners to hide from attention than to directly ask for privacy or personal space.
- Never address older people at the same level; use the words "*tito*" ("uncle") or "*tita*" ("auntie") for relatives of friends but only if they are close or prefer to be addressed in that manner. Mister, Mrs., and Miss will suffice in more formal situations especially if it is only the first introduction.
- When speaking to elders, be respectful in tone and language, using "*opo*" (respectful form of "*oo*", the Filipino word for "yes") and its shortcut "*pò*" wheresoever required. "*Pò*", unlike "*opo*", may be inserted in more places in a sentence (usually Filipino, but sometimes in Englog or Taglish) instead of simply functioning as a reply in the affirmative. Example: "*Kakain na po tayo.*" (We are going to eat now.)

The use of these respectful words is sometimes considered to be a fundamental tenet in local etiquette, especially when taught to children, and is also admirable in a child if he/she makes use of this in conversation with adults. However, this rule may not always apply to non-Tagalog speaking regions.

- Boisterous or loud talking is generally frowned upon, but this rule is almost never followed, except by the educated, or when someone is in pain or distress.
- Hosts will strive to appear happy and gracious while guests will strive to appear happy and grateful in all situations. Any shortcomings in this regard are seen as bad manners.
- Hosts will invariably lay out a snack for their visitors. Visitors should always accept and consume the snack. Declining is considered rude in behalf of the host who is taken to offer his own food at the guest. Only in certain circumstances is it socially acceptable to decline, i.e., if the guest is allergic.
- When chancing upon a Filipino eating, he would invite the visitor by inviting him to eat. However, to actually sit down and eat upon his invitation is considered rude. It is the host's prerogative to be gracious, but it is the guest's burden to avoid being overbearing. When asked as such: "*Kain na*" (let's eat), it is considered more polite to reply "*Salamat, tapos na ako.*" (Thanks, I'm finished.) or to say that he is still full rather than declining bluntly.
- While Filipinos use forks, spoons and knives, these utensils are used in a different way than in western countries, particularly because rice is a part of most meals. The spoon, held in the right hand, is used to scoop up the food or cut up bite-sized pieces of food; the fork in the left hand helps in cutting up the food. Chopsticks are not normally used outside of Chinese and Japanese restaurants.
- The last morsel of food is almost always left on the plate. If someone wants to eat it, he or she should ask if anybody else wants it.
- If someone needs to walk in front of the TV or between two people, he or she must say "Excuse me" and lower the head, almost bowing, while passing through.
- When one person meets an acquaintance at any form of public transport, he/she must never forget to greet him/her. In some instances, one takes the responsibility to pay his companion's fare. Allowing this to happen without protest is considered rude.
- When one driving or riding his own vehicle sees an acquaintance on the street, it is prerogative to stop and offer him a ride, especially if his acquaintance's destination is on his way. The one offered upon is free to make his choice, as declining or accepting the offer is not frowned upon.
- In the Philippines, kissing and displaying affection in public is considered scandalous and in bad taste, but it is likewise rude to make a scene of it; one merely ignores, or at best, stares down couples who make public displays of affection.
- While the Philippines is predominantly Roman Catholic, some areas have a Muslim majority and many points of Etiquette in the Middle East can apply.
- When gesturing for someone to come hither, he or she must face the palm to the ground and gesture the fingers back. The Western gesture for this, where the palm is faced upwards is considered a gesture for sex.

Ref.: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etiquette_in_Asia#Philippines