

Filipino Body Language

by Allan on Thursday, January 27th, 2011 | 72 Comments

We all use body language even though we are not usually aware of it ... things like eye movement, facial expressions, how we stand and so on. All these things give information to others about us even though we have never said a word.

When pointed out to us these seem obvious.

Filipinos, however, have many more forms of body language than westerners, so if you want to merge into the Filipino culture here are some things to look for.

Greetings

Filipinos usually greet each other with a smile and eye contact. As soon as they make eye contact they raise and lower their eyebrows as an additional greeting sign.

This instantly establishes their relationship as friendly.

Negative Gestures

However, there is another form of eye contact – something called “the evil eye.” It is simply a hard stare without the smile or the eyebrow movement. This is considered both arrogant and rude.

And so is standing with your hands on your waist with your elbows stuck out.

Another extremely rude gesture is the single finger pointed straight out with the other fingers curled in.

Combine these crude, rude gestures and you have the ultimate insult wrapped in body language. The message is clear ... if you want to blend into Philippine society, don't do these!

Room Etiquette

When you have to move to another part of the room and have to go between people who are standing and talking, the Philippine custom is to clasp your hands together in front of you, and pass with your head lowered.

This is both a sign of respect and a silent apology for interrupting them.

Respect for Family Elders

Filipinos show great respect for family elders. A traditional sign of respect is for the younger person to hold the elder's hand and place his knuckles on her forehead.

Beckoning

Filipinos attract attention, especially in restaurants, by making a gentle psssst sound – basically a quiet hiss.

To beckon someone, perhaps a waiter in a restaurant, never crook your finger or use the western palm-up wave of the hand. That is considered vulgar. Instead hold the open hand palm down and wave toward you, rather like a dog pawing the ground.

This sign is often used by traffic enforcers trying to direct traffic. Their meaning is not always obvious so it may take you a moment or two to figure out what they mean.

Instead of this gesture many traffic enforcers simply wave a piece of rag. This is even harder to interpret. You will often see this used by the local barangay police as they direct traffic past a funeral procession.

Smiling

Filipinos always smile – they smile when they are happy, they smile when they are embarrassed, they even smile when they are angry. In fact a smile when angry helps defuse the situation, unlike western cultures where anger often leads to fisticuffs.

To a westerner all this smiling makes it difficult to know exactly what Filipinos mean when they smile at you. Your first interpretation will usually be correct – that the smile is one of friendship – but sometimes you will have to judge the smile in light of the situation.

Happy smiling!

This is just a sample of Filipino body language, but knowing these will be a good start to understanding the Filipino culture. It will also make your travel here much more enjoyable.

Ref.: <http://myamazingphilippines.com/filipino-body-language/>