

Philippines Travel Tips – Understanding Filipino Body Language

You're sure to notice that Filipinos make an effort to look good by dressing well and staying clean. But for them, the body is more than just appearance. Body parts are clear communication tools.

Pointing with the mouth

Filipinos have a unique tradition of using the mouth to point out a direction. When asked for directions, he vaguely answers doon (there) then points his lips in the direction you should follow. With a few more questions, you'll be rewarded with more specific details. DON'T mistake his pouting lips as getting ready to kiss you.

Eyebrow greeting

While Westerners say "Hi!", "How are you?", "Hello!" and "Gday!" when they see a friend, Filipinos use their eyebrows. Upon seeing a friend or an acquaintance, as if on cue both eyebrows rise to acknowledge eye contact. A smile sometimes accompanies this greeting.

Staring is rude

As in most other cultures, staring is rude. But Filipinos cannot help gazing foreigners, especially Caucasians, Filipinos admire their tall height and creamy white complexions. DON'T feel offended when you catch them staring. An American executive was once caught inside a van in Manila's traffic jam. The next thing he knew a school bus full of kids was staring at him, delighted to see a Caucasian. Instead of getting irritated, he made faces back at them. This thrilled the kids immensely. Be flattered instead of annoyed, when people stare innocently. DO smile or even better, make a funny face when you catch Filipinos staring at you.

Watch that finger

DON'T point at someone. It is considered ill mannered. Also, never use your middle finger for pointing or to call attention. It might be mistaken for an offensive gesture. If you want to call someone, beckon with the fingers moving in a downward motion.

Smiles

Some Asian cultures are wary of smiling, both giving and receiving, especially if they do not know the smiler. A natural reaction would be "what does he want from me"? Or, "Oh hell, he knows me but I don't – remember him. Where can I hide!" But to Filipinos, smiling comes naturally. Even during a bad patch, Filipinos still manage to smile.

A smile is a pleasant greeting to friends, relatives and even strangers. Sometimes, the smile is a convenient mask for the Filipino when he is unsure or does not know what to do. Instead of asking a lot of questions which could embarrass him (remember hiyai) and the person he is talking to, he merely smiles. A smile is also a polite response when a Filipino does not want to commit, yet he does not want to embarrass the person asking. So whether you're happy, sad, nervous, confused or unsure, do as the Pinoys do – SMILE!

Physical contact among men and women

Filipinos are very tactile people. Parents frequently hug or smother their kids with kisses. Close female friends hold each other's hands when walking along the street or around the mall. Filipino males, on the other hand, are comfortable placing their arms over the shoulders of their friends.

DON'T get the impression that we're a nation of gays and lesbians!

While many cultures would assume homosexual overtones, holding hands is socially acceptable in the Philippines as it is too in India, Bangladesh and other Asian societies.

When calling someone's attention, a light tap on the arm or elbow is used. A handshake is granted when meeting people. Other than that, avoid physical contact with the opposite sex. Unnecessary touching may be interpreted as a romantic liking for the person, or may even be considered offensive.

Passing in-between

Whether they are passing in between two people talking or someone watching TV, Filipinos will try to be as inconspicuous as possible. Because of their hiya to disturb people, they pass with their heads bowed, bodies slouched and their hands clasped together in front of them, saying "Excuse me, excuse me." They are doing their best to pretend they are invisible.

Scratching the head

No, it's not dandruff. When uncertain, confused, or they don't know the answer, Pinoys automatically scratch their heads, just like in the cartoons.

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