



PHILIPPINE CULTURAL GUIDE

*A Practical Guide to Building Trust, Working Effectively, and
Serving Successfully Alongside the Filipino People.*

WELCOME

Welcome to the Philippine family!

We are so glad that you are here. We welcome you not only as missionaries, but as brothers and sisters who have come to serve alongside us in the work of the Gospel. We are grateful that you have said yes to God and that you are willing to come, learn, serve, and labor with us for the salvation of the Filipino people and the equipping of local churches. We pray that your time here will be more than a mission trip. We pray that it will become a meaningful encounter with Filipino people, Filipino culture, and, most importantly, with what God is doing in this nation.

We want you to know that you are not simply coming to the Philippines. You are coming to people.

You are coming to Filipino people who have a name, a family, a story, a culture, a language, and a God-given destiny. You will enter schools where teachers will open their doors to you. You will serve alongside Filipino pastors, evangelists, and ministry workers. You will stand in churches where people have faithfully served God for years. You will meet communities and families who will welcome you into their homes and their lives. You will preach the Gospel, train churches in evangelism and discipleship, build relationships, and labor together with Filipino believers for the advancement of God's Kingdom. But before you can effectively speak to a people, you must first learn to understand and honor them.

We do not come as foreigners who know everything. We do not come to impose our culture. We do not come to compare the Philippines with our own nations. We come as servants. We come as learners. We come as brothers and sisters. We come as messengers of Christ.

WELCOME

The Gospel is unchanging, but the people we serve are wonderfully diverse. The way we greet, speak, listen, eat, dress, joke, correct, lead, and build relationships can either open a door or unintentionally close one. That is why cultural understanding is not an optional part of missions. It is part of loving people well.

Paul said: *"I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some."* — 1 Corinthians 9:22

Our goal is not simply to preach and train Filipinos. Our goal is to walk with them, serve with them, listen to them, honor them, and labor together with them so that the Gospel can go forth with greater love, greater understanding, and greater effectiveness.

As you enter Philippines, remember: You are entering someone else's community. You are entering someone else's church. You are entering someone else's school. You are entering someone's home culture. And you are entering the lives of Filipino people who are precious to God.

Come with humility. Come ready to learn. Come ready to serve. Come ready to listen. And above all, come carrying the heart of Jesus. Because before they hear our message, they will see our attitude and character. Before they hear what we preach, they will experience how we treat them. And before they ask what we believe, they may first ask themselves whether the Christ we preach is truly reflected in us. We can't wait to welcome and serve alongside you!

Together in the Harvest,
Shekinah Sinense & Team

GET TO KNOW THE PHILIPPINE CULTURE



WHO ARE FILIPINO PEOPLE?

- **Filipinos are hospitable** They naturally welcome guests and often go out of their way to make you feel at home.
- **Filipinos are warm** They value friendliness, personal connection, and genuine human interaction.
- **Filipinos are relational** Relationships and personal connections are an important part of how people work and communicate.
- **Filipinos are generous** They often share what they have, even when they have little.
- **Filipinos are helpful** They are often willing to assist, accommodate, and go the extra mile for others.
- **Filipinos are respectful** Respect for elders, leaders, pastors, teachers, and people in positions of responsibility is highly valued.
- **Filipinos value harmony** Many prefer to avoid unnecessary conflict, embarrassment, or confrontation.
- **Filipinos are appreciative** Sincere gratitude, encouragement, and recognition can mean a great deal.
- **Filipinos are adaptable** They are often able to adjust quickly to changing situations and find ways to make things work.
- **Filipinos are family-oriented** Family relationships are deeply valued and often influence decisions, priorities, and relationships.
- **Filipinos love to celebrate** Birthdays, victories, milestones, gatherings, and special occasions are often celebrated with food, fellowship, music, and joy.
- **Filipinos love food and fellowship** Sharing a meal is often more than simply eating, it is a way of building friendship and showing care.
- **Filipinos value friendship** Trust often grows through spending time together and developing a genuine relationship.
- **Filipinos can be indirect when communicating** They may communicate discomfort, disagreement, or refusal more gently rather than saying “no” directly because they don’t want to offend or hurt people.
- **Filipinos are often sensitive to how others speak to them** Tone, facial expressions, and the way something is communicated can matter as much as the words themselves.
- **Filipinos are resilient** They often demonstrate remarkable strength, perseverance, and resourcefulness in difficult circumstances.
- **Filipinos are joyful** Even in challenging circumstances, you will often encounter humor, laughter, music, and a strong ability to find joy.
- **Filipinos deeply value being treated with dignity** Humility, kindness, respect, and genuine appreciation can open the door to strong and lasting relationships.

FIRST: REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE ENTERING A NATION NOT YOUR OWN

Foreign missionaries can sometimes unintentionally behave as though they are the leaders simply because they are foreigners, have more resources, or are preaching.

The Filipino team knows the churches, schools, teachers, local leaders, language, transportation, customs, and community.

Don't arrive saying:

"This is how we normally do it in our country."

Instead:

"How do you normally do this here?"

"What would be appropriate in this church or school?"

"How can we serve your team?"

"Is there anything culturally important that we should know?"

UNDERSTAND THE FILIPINO HEART

One of the most important things to understand is that Filipinos are generally relationship-oriented.

In many Western cultures, people may build trust through competence:

"Can you do the job?"

Filipinos often ask:

"Can I trust you?", "Do you genuinely care about me?", or "Do you respect me?"

This matters enormously in ministry. A missionary can have an excellent sermon, powerful testimony, and excellent organizational skills, but if people feel that the missionary is cold, arrogant, rushed, or disrespectful, the ministry relationship can suffer.

Remember:

In Philippines, relationship often comes before instruction.

RELATIONSHIP BEFORE AGENDA



Build relationships with the Filipinos who are working alongside you or helping you. Don't simply impose agenda or talk about ministry all the time without first taking the time to build genuine relationships. Filipinos are much more willing to work with, support, and help you when trust, friendship, and genuine relationships have been established.

When you arrive, don't immediately think:

"What do we need to accomplish?"

Also think:

"Who are the people God has placed around us?"

Know their names. Ask about their family. Ask about their church. Ask about their hometown. Ask about their children. Listen to their stories. Sit with them. Eat with them. Laugh with them. These seemingly small things can build enormous trust.

A missionary should never communicate:

"I came here to accomplish something."

Instead:

"I came here to serve alongside you."

HONOR IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT

Filipino culture places significant value on respect and honor, particularly toward elders, pastors, teachers, and people in positions of responsibility.

Use respectful titles such as:

- Pastor
- Bishop
- Evangelist
- Sir
- Ma'am
- Kuya — older man
- Ate — older woman

If someone introduces themselves as “Pastor John,” don't immediately start calling them “John” unless they invite you to.

HOW TO SPEAK WITH FILIPINOS



Speak warmly. Speak kindly. Avoid being overly direct or blunt; communicate with gentleness, honor, and respect.

Instead of: *"Give me that."*

Say: *"Could you please help me with this?"*

Instead of: *"You need to do this."*

Say: *"Would it be possible for us to do this?"*

Instead of: *"That's wrong."*

Say: *"Maybe we can look at another way of doing this."*

Instead of: *"Why didn't you do it?"*

Say: *"Was there something that prevented us from doing this?"*

The difference isn't weakness. It is honor in communication.

BE CAREFUL WITH DIRECT CONFRONTATION

Some foreigners come from cultures where direct confrontation is considered healthy:

"I disagree with you."

"That's a bad idea."

"You made a mistake."

"This isn't acceptable."

Filipinos perceive very direct confrontation as humiliating or disrespectful, particularly when done publicly.

This is especially important when correcting: Pastors, Teachers, Volunteers, Ministry Partners, Older people, and Young people.

HOW TO CORRECT FILIPINOS

Filipinos generally value respect, harmony, and preserving one another's dignity. When correction is necessary, especially when working with Filipinos, avoid embarrassing someone or making them feel belittled.

Avoid correcting someone publicly when possible. If correction is necessary, consider doing it privately, respectfully, and with a genuine desire to help them grow.

One helpful approach is the ***Sandwich Method***: **GOOD → CORRECTION → GOOD**.

1. **GOOD** — Affirm what they did well. Begin by recognizing something sincere and positive about the person or their work.
2. **CORRECTION** — Address what needs to improve. Explain the issue clearly, but focus on the behavior or situation rather than attacking the person.
3. **GOOD** — End with encouragement. Reaffirm your trust in them and communicate that the correction is meant to help, not to condemn.

HOW TO CORRECT FILIPINOS

Instead of:

"You did this wrong."

Say:

"Thank you for helping with the ministry today. I really appreciate your willingness to serve. Can I share something that might help us improve this for next time? We may need to handle this part a little differently so everything runs more smoothly. But you did a great job overall, and I really appreciate your heart to serve."

Correct the action, not the person. Protect their dignity. **Speak privately** when possible. Be clear without being harsh. Leave them encouraged, not humiliated.

The goal of correction is not to prove that you are right, but to help the person grow and strengthen the mission together.

LEARN TO SAY “PO” AND “OPO”

Po is a marker of politeness and respect in Philippines.

Opo is a respectful way of saying “yes.”

Examples:

“Thank you po.”

“Yes po.”

“Good morning po.”

“Can we go inside po?”

You don't need to force it into every sentence, but learning these expressions shows that you are trying to honor the Filipino culture.

Even a foreigner saying: *“Thank you po!”* can immediately communicate warmth and respect.

SAVING FACE

Filipinos can be sensitive to embarrassment, particularly public embarrassment. Avoid making someone look foolish in front of others.

For example, don't say during a meeting:

"Pastor, you clearly didn't understand what I explained."

Instead:

"Maybe I didn't explain that clearly. Let me explain it another way."

This preserves dignity while still solving the problem.

Honor the person in public, correct the person in private.

Missionary principle:

Correct the problem without destroying the person's dignity.

LEARN HOW TO BE SENSITIVE



Being sensitive is roughly the ability to sense what another person is feeling or what is appropriate without everything having to be explicitly stated.

It involves paying attention to:

- facial expressions
- tone
- silence
- body language
- hesitation
- discomfort

Don't only listen to Filipino words. Learn to listen to the atmosphere.

And when you sense that something is wrong, don't ignore it, but don't immediately assume you know what the person is feeling either. Gently ask.

LEARN HOW TO BE SENSITIVE

For example:

Instead of: *"You seem upset."*

Try: *"Are you okay?"*

Or: *"Is everything okay? I just wanted to check on you."*

Or: *"I noticed you became quiet. Are you okay?"*

Most of the times, a Filipino may not immediately say, *"I'm uncomfortable," "I'm hurt,"* or *"I disagree."* They may become quieter, hesitant, or simply say *"Okay lang"* even when something is bothering them.

So you should learn to notice, ask, and give space. When you sense something, don't jump to conclusions. Ask with kindness. This is especially important when working with Filipinos. A simple *"Are you okay?"* can communicate that you value the person, not just the work.

LOCAL PEOPLE ARE NOT “HELPERS”

This is an important principle to know in Philippines. Although Filipinos are generally warm, hospitable, and willing to help, do not treat Filipino pastors, evangelists, or ministry workers as though they are merely there to translate, arrange transportation, carry equipment, find food, solve problems, or simply follow instructions.

They are not assistants. They are partners in the Gospel. They are our family. Treat them as co-laborers. Honor their experience, listen to their insights, involve them in decisions, and work alongside them as co-laborers in the Gospel.

Ask:

“What do you think?”

“What would work best here?”

“What should we understand about this community?”

“How would you approach this?”

HOSPITALITY: FILIPINOS WILL PROBABLY FEED YOU

Filipinos often express love through food.

A Filipino may say: *"Have some food."*

And they may really mean: *"You are welcome here. We want you to feel at home."*

If a Filipino offers food, don't automatically respond: *"No, I'm fine."*

A warmer response might be: *"Thank you! I can't eat now. But that looks delicious."*

Even in schools in the Philippines, principals/headmasters may prepare food for you in their office as an expression of gratitude for coming to speak at their school. If you cannot eat because of your schedule or because you have another appointment, politely say:

"Thank you so much for preparing this for us. We really appreciate your kindness and generosity. We're sorry that we have to leave soon because of our schedule, but we're truly grateful. We hope we can enjoy a meal with you next time!"

HOSPITALITY: FILIPINOS WILL PROBABLY FEED YOU

Missionary rule:

Don't criticize Filipino food.

Don't say: *"This is too sweet.", "Why do you eat so much rice?", "This is strange.", "We don't eat this in my country."*

If something isn't your preference, simply don't eat much of it. **Sample proper response:** *"Thank you for preparing this for us. I really appreciate it. I'm still getting used to the flavors, but I'm grateful that you shared this with me."*

Missionary principle:

You don't have to love every Filipino dish. But honor the person who prepared it. In Filipino culture, food is often an expression of hospitality, generosity, and care. A respectful response protects the relationship even when the food isn't your preference.

FILIPINOS MAY ASK PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Foreign missionaries may be surprised by questions by locals such as:

"Are you married?"

"Do you have children?"

"How old are you?"

"Where do you live?"

"Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?"

"When are you getting married?"

This isn't intended as an interrogation. It is simply a relationship-building conversation because Filipinos are relational.

You can answer comfortably or politely redirect.

For example: *"Not yet! Maybe someday. How about you?"* A little humor can help.

DON'T COMPARE THE PHILIPPINES NEGATIVELY TO YOUR COUNTRY

Absolutely prohibit comments like:

"In America, we do this properly."

"Our schools are much better."

"Your roads are terrible."

"Why don't Filipinos...?"

"In my country, this would never happen."

Even if the observation is technically true, it usually doesn't help the mission.

The missionary's job isn't to evaluate the Philippines.

The job is to love Filipinos.



HONOR FILIPINO MEAL TIMES

Some foreigners are deeply focused on the mission. They are passionate about the Gospel, the schedule is full, and there is always something that needs to be done. We understand this, and we honor the passion.

However, one important part of Filipino culture is that meal times are highly valued. Filipinos generally eat their meals at regular times, and lunch is commonly eaten between 11:00 AM and 1:00 PM.

Please do your best to eat lunch within this window and avoid consistently pushing lunch into the late afternoon.

This may seem like a small matter, but over the years, there have been situations where local drivers, translators, ministry workers, and other Filipino partners have ended up eating lunch very late because they were prioritizing the foreign missionary's schedule. While Filipinos may not complain, they can feel that their needs are not being considered or respected.

In most cases, local drivers have eventually chosen to stop serving because they felt they were not being treated well. We do not want to lose the very people God has placed around us to help make the mission possible. There have also been instances where some local preachers experienced acid reflux, after repeatedly skipping meals or eating very late during demanding ministry schedules.

Remember: People are part of our mission.

LEARN TO APPRECIATE FILIPINOS

Filipino culture highly values appreciation and encouragement. When someone welcomes you, serves you, helps you, prepares food, organizes an outreach, or works alongside you, don't take it for granted.

Learn to notice the effort and say thank you. Don't only point out what needs to be improved. Recognize what was done well.

Notice the little things:

- Thank the pastor for opening his church.
- Thank the teachers for welcoming you into their school.
- Thank the volunteers for serving.
- Appreciate the Filipino team for their hard work.
- Compliment the food and hospitality sincerely.
- Celebrate someone's contribution publicly when appropriate.
- Tell people when they did something well.
- Express gratitude often, not only when something goes wrong.

A simple:

"Thank you. You did a great job." or *"We really appreciate you."* can go a long way.

And don't make appreciation feel fake or exaggerated. Be genuine. Be specific. Be generous with encouragement.

WHEN FILIPINOS SPEAK IN THEIR LOCAL LANGUAGE

You may mostly hear Filipinos speaking in their local dialect or language, especially when they are talking with one another. Do not become frustrated, show dismay, or make them feel uncomfortable simply because you cannot understand what they are saying.

Many Filipinos can understand English, but not everyone can speak it, especially in more casual or local settings. Speaking in their own language is a natural part of their culture and should not be taken as disrespect or as an attempt to exclude you.

If you are curious about what they are discussing, ask kindly and warmly:

"Oh, what are you talking about? I'd love to understand."

Filipinos are generally quick to adapt and accommodate. They may simply ask a Filipino friend who speaks English well to help explain or relay the conversation to you.

Be patient, stay curious, and never show irritation.

WHEN EXTERNAL PRESSURES AFFECT YOU

Mission work will not always go according to plan. You may get stuck in traffic and arrive late at a school, experience a vehicle breakdown, have a principal reject your request, or face unexpected changes and delays. It is normal to feel frustrated, but do not allow your frustration to become someone else's burden.

Avoid showing irritation, raising your voice, blaming others, or allowing your mood to affect the Filipino people working alongside you. Stay calm, gracious, and respectful, especially under pressure.

Filipinos will often remember not only how you handled success, but also how you treated people when things did not go your way.

Your circumstances may be difficult, but your attitude should remain Christlike.

GESTURE OF APPRECIATION

When a Filipino church, volunteer, pastor, evangelist, or local preacher helps you, make it a point to express genuine gratitude and appreciation.

A simple thank-you is meaningful, but when appropriate, you can also show your appreciation by taking them out for a meal, giving a small gift, or giving a love gift as an expression of gratitude.

Filipinos are generally warm, generous, and hospitable people who genuinely enjoy helping others. They do not necessarily help because they expect something in return, but they value and respond warmly to sincere appreciation for what they have done.

Never take their kindness or hospitality for granted. A simple gesture of appreciation can communicate honor, strengthen relationships, and make them feel valued as partners in the work of the Gospel.

MISSIONARY'S POSTURE

I am a servant.

I am not coming to be important.

I am a learner.

I don't know everything about this culture.

I am a guest.

The Filipino people are welcoming me into their community.

I am a brother/sister.

I am coming to build genuine relationships.

I am a representative.

My behavior reflects Christ and CfaN.

I am a messenger.

I am here to preach the Gospel faithfully.

I am a partner.

The Filipino church and ministry workers are not assistants to foreign missionaries. We labor together.



We all come from different nations, cultures, and backgrounds. We were raised with different customs, ways of communicating, ways of thinking, and ways of doing things. Our culture is part of the story God has written in us, and we do not need to be ashamed of where we come from.

But when God sends us to another nation, we are not called to make that nation become like us. We are called to learn, adapt, honor, and serve the people God has entrusted to us.

You cannot change where you came from, but you can choose to adapt to the culture of the nation where God is sending you.

You may come with an anointing.
You may come with great preaching.
You may have extraordinary gifts and talents.
You may be able to reach thousands.

But gifts can open doors; ***character*** determines what happens after you walk through them.

The anointing may take you to places.
Your talent may put you on platforms.
Your gifting may bring opportunities.

But it is ***Christlike character*** that will sustain you when you get there.

Jesus did not only call us to do great things for Him. He called us to become like Him.

We love you, and we want to see you succeed. We want your time in the Philippines to be fruitful, joyful, and effective. We want you to build beautiful relationships with Filipino pastors, churches, volunteers, teachers, students, and ministry partners. We want you to feel welcomed, understood, and equipped as you step into what God has called you to do here.

Everything in these pages has been shared with one heart: to help set you up for success in your mission to the Philippines.

So please receive this guide not as a list of rules, but as an expression of love from people who want to serve alongside you. We know you are coming with a sincere heart to preach the Gospel, and we are honored to labor with you.

I pray that this guide helps you. I pray that it gives you greater understanding, wisdom, patience, and appreciation for the Filipino people. And I pray that as you learn the culture, you will not only become more effective in ministry, but that you will also reflect Jesus more beautifully.

Because at the end of the day, we are not simply trying to do ministry together. We are trying to represent Christ together.

Welcome to the Philippines.
Welcome to the mission field.
Let us labor together for the Gospel.
Let us see the Philippines and Asia come to Jesus.

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