

# Balikbayan Traveling Tips

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AJPress



For most Filipinos living abroad, nothing comes close to the excitement of going back home to the Philippines, either for a short visit or an extended stay. Days, even weeks before the actual trip, sweet dreams are made of these: fun-filled reunions with long-missed family members and friends, eating sumptuous servings of Pinoy delicacies, endless shopping expeditions, and exciting out-of-town holidays.

If you haven't been to the homeland for quite a while, we've gathered some tips to ensure you have a great, hassle-free *Balikbayan* trip ahead.

**1. Baggage Allowance**

Since last year, most airlines traveling from North America to the Philippines have decreased their free baggage allowance for economy class from 2 pieces of 32 kg (70 lbs.) to 23 kg (50 lbs.) each. This includes that *balikbayan* box.

**2. Restricted Items**

The new rules ban almost all liquids, creams and gels from being carried aboard flights. That means you should not pack sunscreen, liquid make-up foundation, lotion, shampoo, toothpaste, hair gel or beverages in your hand-carried bag. Those items must be put in your checked-in bags. If you are in doubt about an item, pack it in a checked bag or leave it home. If you forget to remove liquids or gels from your bags before you get to the security checkpoint, they will be confiscated. A few exceptions—you can still bring baby formula, breast milk or juice if you're traveling with a child; prescription drugs if your name is on the bottle; and insulin or other essential non-prescription medications.

**3. Packing**

If you're planning to visit the Philippines within the next three months, pack loose, lightweight clothing to beat the heat. Few locals wear shorts or sleeveless shirts in the city, but tourists can

bend the rules somewhat. To blend in better, dress like the locals: in jeans and T-shirts. Umbrellas are useful against sun and rain. If heading to the mountains, pack a fleece jacket.

Travel light; in other words, don't overpack. Easier said than done—especially when so many *kababayans* ask you if they can send a package or two to their relatives thru you. What many *balikbayans* do is pack only a couple of casual clothes and a pair or two of more formal clothes. That then leaves room for them to shop for new clothes, shoes, bags and accessories in Manila where bargains abound.

**4. Learn the Language, Understand the Culture**

If you were born or raised in the States and don't know how to speak the language, it would be good to study a few phrases to get by. It is of great pleasure for Filipinos to hear a foreigner trying to speak at least a word in Filipino or in local dialect. You may see them giggle at your foreign accent or pronunciation but don't take it as an insult. They are simply surprised and impressed hearing a stranger like you, speaking Filipino or local dialect in your own way. It makes them feel proud of their history and culture. In return, you will gain their respect.

Most Filipinos have a very strong sense of nationalism and religiosity. Try not to criticize the country and the people, nor ask critical questions that will provoke them, unless you are talking to your friend or relative whom you know will not get offended or the

person you want to ask is open-minded.

**5. Important Documents**

A passport must be valid for at least six months to enter the Philippines. However, it is best that you renew your passport prior to entering the country if you only have seven months left to save you from any hassles.

Leave details of your travel itinerary and details, passport, and your credit cards with friends or relatives at home. Make sure you photocopy your passport and then never leave home without this copy on you; separate from your actual passport, in case of lost/stolen passport. It is smart to also store vital information of your passport in your email for easy retrieval when needed.

Do not overstay beyond the limit of your visa. If you overstay, you will automatically be fined for each day you remain in the Philippines beyond the date stamped in your passport. If you cannot pay, you may be arrested, detained over a period of many months and then deported. If you wish to extend your visa, you should apply seven (7) days before the expiration of your approved stay. For more information, you may visit [www.immigration.gov.ph](http://www.immigration.gov.ph).

Insurance is essential for traveling in the Philippines; do not forget to leave home without it. Make sure that your insurance covers both medical treatment and unexpected losses/expenses (e.g. missed flight, lost passport, stolen credit card/cash).

Keep a separate copy of your credit card numbers and telephone numbers to call if your cards are lost or stolen.

Remember to bring your prescription from your doctor or hospital if you are using prescribed medicine.

Ensure that you have enough funds for your stay and return flight. Bank transfers can take time and if you miss your flight or your ticket becomes invalid, you may have to purchase another ticket to get home and cover other emergencies, including overstay of your visa.

**6. Customs Declaration**

Visitors carrying more than US\$ 3,000 are to declare this at the Central Bank of the Philippines counter at customs. Forbidden items are: firearms, explosives, pornographic material, seditious or subversive material, narcotics and other internationally prohibited drugs (unless accompanied by a medical prescription), gambling articles and machines and misbranded and adulterated foodstuffs.

**Enjoying the Islands**

Once you land in the Philippines, you will see why they say Filipinos are one of the friendliest races in the world with a great sense of hospitality. They will try their best to please you and make your trip most memorable.

*Balikbayans* should make it a point to visit all the popular places of the country like the following:

Boracay—Found in Aklan, Boracay is said to possess one of the best beaches in the whole world.

Mayon Volcano—Travel to the Bicol region of the Philippines so you'll be able to see for yourself the perfect cone shape of Mayon Volcano.

Banaue Rice Terraces—described as the Eighth Wonder of the World.

Surigao—A province of the Philippines that is starting to make wave in the tourist world, literally and figuratively as it's known to be a good site for surfing.

Aside from the above, so many other beautiful places to visit are: Puerto Princesa, Coron, Palawan, Panglao Island, Bohol, Puerto Galera, Siargao, Cagayan de Oro, Cebu City, Camiguin Island, Davao City, Dumaguete, Siquijor Island, Batangas, Subic Bay, Batanes Islands, Pagudpud, Laoag and Vigan, Guimaras Island.

Continued on Page 5

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