

Photo requirement guidelines for new MRP

by DYMPHNA CALICA-LA PUTT
AJPress

A “Mona Lisa” smile is strongly suggested for Filipinos who will have their pictures taken for their passport applications.

Unacceptable photos may be rejected, causing applications for machine-readable passports (MRPs) to be delayed.

“When having their photos taken, applicants may smile. The “Mona Lisa” smile is recommended,” the Philippine Consulate General Los Angeles (PCG LA) said in its website.

It further said in its guidelines that an applicant may show teeth and gums but the smile “should not distort his or her features in the photo.”

For its part, the Philippine Consulate General New York (PCG New York) also reminded passport applicants to show a “medium smile” in their pictures. Photos can be rejected if the image is distorted where “the head is tilted or the smile is too wide,” it said in an earlier press statement.

Smiling is only one of a stringent set of rules on photograph submissions that both consular offices are imposing on MRP applicants.

Other photographs that could be denied are those where women are wearing excessive make-up and/or large earrings, as well as those where men are wearing make-up and/or earrings.

Applicants wearing dark eyeglasses or colored contact lenses in photos will not be accepted. Dirty, damaged, or digitally-altered pictures are also unacceptable.

“The photograph of the passport holder is important because

it verifies the identity of the holder,” the Passport Division of the Philippine Office of Consular Affairs said in its guideline.

Other photo requirements include: royal blue background, frontal shot, and wearing of collared shirt or any decent attire. Passport applicants also need to make sure that both ears can be seen in the photographs that they will submit.

To make compliance easier for Filipinos in New York, the Philippine Consulate in the city has discussed its strict requirements with several photo studios in the area.

PCG New York Vice Consul Elena Maningat said their office has provided the blue photo background to these studios. She added the studios agreed to re-take photographs that may be rejected at no additional cost to the applicant.

“This way, we are assured that the photos are up to the standard needed for the MRP,” she told the *Asian Journal*.

Vice Consul Maningat said the personal appearance requirement that the PCG imposes for MRP applicants works out well because they can refer these applicants to photo studios nearby.

MRPs are the new travel document issued by the Philippine government as prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

The ICAO is an agency of the United Nations that fosters the planning and development of air transport. It has required all its member states, including the Philippines, to issue MRPs before April 1st 2010.

The maroon-colored travel document is tamper-proof and is expected to make traveling faster and more convenient.

While unexpired green Philippine passports may still be used after April 2010, most countries will require travelers to hold an MRP for their travel. Green passport-holders may be asked to form

a separate line for their information to be encoded, making the process slower.

The new maroon-colored MRP has a “machine readable zone” containing the personal data of the passport holder that can be read by a machine or computer.

“This eases entry because the immigration officer no longer needs to encode the information manually. This eases exiting (a country) for the same reason,” Vice Consul General Maningat said.

The MRP’s superior security features compared to the green passports is also expected to eliminate the possibility of identity theft and acts of fraud.

The Philippine government has started issuing MRPs last year. Filipinos residing in the United States need to apply in person at the consular office that is nearest their place of residence.

Philippine consular offices in the United States hold monthly or bi-monthly consular outreach programs that make passport application more convenient since applicants not have to travel far to apply for passports.

PCG New York will hold outreach programs in Massachusetts on May 9 and in Rochester, New York on May 16. This consular office has jurisdiction over Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

PCG LA, which covers Southern Nevada, Southern California, Texas and Arizona, will hold consular outreach programs in Panorama City, California on May 16th and in Las Vegas, NV on May 23rd and 24th.

Complete schedule of the consular outreach programs of these two offices, as well as other Philippine consulates, can be seen in their respective websites. (Dymphna Calica-La Putt)

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