

## **12 DO's and DONT's of Balikbayan-box Shipping**

### **12 DO's and DONT's of Balikbayan-box giving.**

Filipinos from all over the globe are already checking their list and (checking it twice) to make sure they get presents for each of their loved ones back home in the Philippines. But before you toss those goodies into a box you would send to family and friends across the Pacific, remember that sending the only-in-da-Philippines tradition of balikbayan-box giving is not as easy as sealing the box with package tape ten times over and calling a freight-forwarding company to pick it up at your house.

Here are 12 things you need to look out for to ensure that the presents you bought out of your hard-earned money make it to the right people at the perfect time.

#### **1. DO EVALUATE THE FREIGHT-FORWARDING COMPANY YOU WILL TRUST YOUR BOX WITH.**

Manny Paez, owner of Manila Forwarder, one of the leading balikbayan-box companies in the United States right now, advises his fellow kababayans to pay attention to the first phone call they would make to the company. Yes, right when you call – when you talk to them on the phone, when you talk to their staff. Apparently, this says a lot about the company. Most companies are hard to contact and when you finally get through, you will be talking to an answering machine. This will say something about the company, how ill-equipped they are, how they may not have enough personnel to take care of their client's needs or provide the quality of service that clients deserve. If a company can't even station a regular person to take your calls and answer your concerns, shouldn't you have doubts that they can take care of your package?

#### **2. DON'T ENTRUST YOUR BOX TO A COMPANY WHICH BACKGROUND YOU HAVEN'T CHECKED. THEY MAY GIVE A LOT OF PROMISES, TIME AND SAFETY-WISE, BUT PROMISES ARE JUST WORDS. THEY COULD EASILY BE BROKEN.**

Of course, with our technology now, you can check the website for Federal Maritime Commission – a U.S. agency that regulates the freight-forwarding companies and like businesses; as well as the Philippine Consulate, for the licensed and legit freight-forwarding companies. There's also the Better Business Bureau. Everyone could check to see the standing of their company. On the Philippine side, one may check the Philippine Shipper's Bureau.

Paez of Manila Forwarder is certified by the US Department of Agriculture as an inspector. Manila Forwarder is licensed and bonded by the Federal Maritime Commission which enabled the premier freight-forwarding company to launch their international operations this year. They can now ship to countries like Israel, Lebanon, Middle East, Hong Kong.

"With our network, our know-how, and our background education, we're one of the few Filipino companies that could ship all over the world," Paez said.

#### **3. DO CHECK THE TECHNOLOGICAL CAPABILITY OF THE FREIGHT FORWARDING COMPANY.**

Manila Forwarder's owner had nine years of experience with the U.S. special military unit that deals with counter-terrorists. His experiences from all this enabled him to establish connections necessary for the business and avail of highly-efficient logistics and technology: radio dispatch vehicles commanded by central command center; computer-guided and Global Positioning System enabled; computerized data base; Internet-based packaging tracking system; 24/7 customer telephone support that rotates between Los Angeles Central hub and

Philippine Office.

#### 4. DON'T WORRY TOO MUCH ABOUT THE RATES.

At this point, you would have already spent a considerable amount of money buying presents for the people who matter to you. Saving \$20 on balikbayan-box sending will hardly tip off the scale of your budget sheet. Besides, if you trust a low-cost freight forwarding company and a problem arises (like your box never makes it to the designated consignee), then that will be more problem and more expenses for you.

"We make sure that we have enough cost-margin to provide one of the best services available. The company is not too big, and not too small. It's just the right size, so we are able to synergize our operation in such a way that we don't have too much expense, and at the same time we are not cutting down on the quality of service that we can provide," Paez explained.

#### 5. DO KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.

As a sender and consumer of freight forwarding service, you have your rights. Manila Forwarder, one of the leading freight forwarding companies in the LA County, cares about their clients so much that they are going the extra mile to publish an ad called "Bill of Rights." In this, they enumerate points the balikbayan box sender is entitled to:

- a. You have the right to be respected and receive prompt service and attention.
- b. You have the right to receive a FREE box for the purpose that it is intended.
- c. You have the right to safe, efficient and insured shipment.
- d. You have the right to know the status of your shipment.

#### 6. DON'T LEAVE YOUR SHIPMENT WITHOUT MAKING SURE YOU KNOW HOW IT WILL GET TO ITS DESTINATION.

Your balikbayan box, through Manila Forwarder, usually goes through different stages. Right when it gets picked up, it stays in the company's warehouse for about three days for strapping, plastic wrapping, documentation and loading to the container. After everything has been loaded, the shipment sails the Pacific Ocean toward Taiwan. From there, it goes to the Philippines. The shipping voyage takes about 16 days. When the vessel arrives in Manila, Manila Forwarder usually claims it that same day or the next day after documentation and Philippine Customs inspection. Then the container goes straight to their warehouse located inside the Port of Manila. Yes, Manila Forwarder is the only balikbayan box company with an office right inside the pier. This shows a lot about the company.

The average time of delivery to Metro-Manila destinations from the time they pick it up from the client's house to the actual delivery to the recipient's house is 23-30 days. Add a few more days for provincial deliveries. So now is the time to start packing those shipments to make sure they reach your loved ones in time for the holidays.

#### 7. DO TAKE NOTICE OF THE COMMITMENT OF THE FREIGHT FORWARDING COMPANY.

Not all shipments are hassle-free. Most of the problems stem from unrecognizable addresses. But there's no excuse. A freight forwarding company should do what it has to do – deliver.

"One time we had a client who sent a package to Batanes. We did a lot of efforts and spent more than usual to deliver it on time. We even chartered a plane to deliver it. But then, that's our commitment to our client. We deliver as we have promised," said Manny Paez, owner of Manila Forwarder.

8. DON'T TRUST COMPANIES WHO DO NOTHING BUT COPY OTHER COMPANIE'S SYSTEMS AND PROMOTIONS. IF THEY CAN'T COME UP WITH WAYS TO IMPROVE THEIR SERVICE, WHAT MAKES YOU THINK THEY HAVE THE KNOW-HOW AND EFFICIENCY TO DELIVER ON THEIR PROMISE?

"It's normal; anyone in the business would like to see what's going on with the other companies. And whoever's doing well is being imitated. So it's a compliment for us, although sometimes, they misrepresent themselves to the consumer. Of course, their service is different from ours," Paez commented.

Most companies that offer cheap services do not have their own containers and are not knowledgeable of the shipping industry. There are other expenses involved in doing this type of business that they circumvent. When they get caught by the authorities, they will just disappear together with the balikbayan boxes that patronized them. It has happened before and it will continue happening as long as there are takers of cheap shipping of balikbayan boxes.

He further explained that despite the imitators that usually even offers services for a lower fee it is self-assuring for him and Manila Forwarder staff to know that their clients are very discriminating.

"They are those who can tell the difference between staying in Hilton or in any plush hotel compared to a seedy corner motel where robbers and thieves lure for takers. It's the same with the freight forwarding service," he said. One always gets what they pay for. They know they could relax when they ship thru Manila Forwarder.

9. Do it the right way.

Make sure you follow steps 1-8. Remember that you labored to earn the \$\$\$ you used to buy presents for your loved ones in the Philippines. You should take a little more effort to make sure every product of your hard work gets to them safely, quickly and hassle-free. Can you imagine how much stress you'd have to deal with should something bad happen to your shipment just because you didn't make sure it would get to them the way you want it to?

Go ahead and make that phone call. As you speak to the staff of the freight forwarding company, know that the conversation will pretty much tell you how the service will be. Is the person on the other line knowledgeable? Is s/he capable of answering all your questions? Or are you talking to a voice mail which may indicate that the company is under-manned?

Is the company licensed by legit accrediting departments? Is the company using modern technological concepts and logistics to transport your shipment? Is the service they're offering worth the rates they are charging? Do you know how your shipment will get to its destination (even though you addressed it to your relatives in Timbuktu?) How committed are they to deliver on their promise? How creative and innovative are they in terms of cooking up techniques and promos to improve their services?

Do they know and respect your rights as a consumer of the freight forwarding service? Manila Forwarder posts a list of your rights. Check them out.

10. Don't worry. (Be happy)

You've done your part to make sure your family and friends in the Philippines feel your love for them though you can't be with them this holiday season. After you've "surrendered" your shipment to Manila Forwarder, relax and enjoy other things. If you did it the right way, you have nothing to worry about.

11. Do expect a phone call, E-mail or a letter from your loved ones in the Philippines because they will surely get the bottle of perfume, pair of shoes, bag, or even the cans of corned beef you sent them.

12. Don't forget to abide by these 12 Dos and Don'ts of balikbayan box-sending. Until you get used to doing it the right way . . . until you become a meticulous shipment sender . . . sort of a connoisseur who can tell the difference between the services of a first-class company from the other wannabe's.

If you need more information about shipping to the Philippines, log on to [www.manilaforwarder.com](http://www.manilaforwarder.com) or call 1.800.210.1019.

Do It the Right Way.