

A Brief Introduction to Shopping via Balikbayan Box

Introduction

So many Filipinos live and work overseas that a special system for transporting their goods has been set up worldwide. This 'how-to' memo will concentrate on getting items from the US to Manila, however it is possible to ship from Europe, Canada and Australia. See some suggested links below.

Let's start with a disclaimer

All of the information given here is based on my personal experience. I cannot make any guarantees for good service from these companies (or even for mediocre service). Also, since I have only had one box shipped to me so far, I am in no position to give any more details on how the system works. You can google 'Balikbayan', get the names of the sites, and check it out for yourself.

What is a Balikbayan Box?

Balikbayan is the Filipino word for 'returning'. It was originally a way of getting an Overseas Foreign Workers' (OFW) extra baggage home after an assignment in another country. It is now often used by Filipino relatives living in the US to send gifts to family back home. The expat community in Manila uses it to receive some of our favourite things from home in a hassle-free manner.

How do I get started?

The only company I have dealt with is Manila Forwarders (MF), so I will explain their system (but I am sure the other companies all work in the same way). MF have a large warehouse in California. You get in touch with them via their website and say you would like to open a box. There are different sizes available.

What next?

Then you go crazy shopping. You buy just about anything you like online and have it mailed to MF's address in California. You will pay the normal shipping fee applicable. Good news: If the online shop you are ordering from has no shipping fees, the goods arrive in California without any transportation costs.

You can also have friends or family in the US mail their gifts to the same address and they will also go in your box.

Tell MF what you have ordered and give them the tracking number. Tell them whether you want the items unwrapped (saves room in the box) or to keep them wrapped (better for presents).

Shipping to Manila

MF will contact you when your box is getting full. You have 30 days to fill the box otherwise it gets shipped just with what you have in there.

MF will tell you the shipping charges and expected arrival date in Manila. Boxes take 5-6 weeks on average (although one lucky lady recently got her goodies in less than 3 weeks). Before Christmas shipping times are usually a bit longer. You can pay MF via PayPal or a credit card.

And that's it. Like magic, the boxes will arrive at your front door one day. No paperwork, no customs duty, no hassle.

What about large items?

I had a huge swing set sent from the US recently. It also went via MF, but with their 'cargo' division. It took 6 weeks for 260 pounds of wood and plastic to arrive at my house here, and the costs were very reasonable.

Drawbacks, Problems, etc.

- Estimated arrival dates for the boxes are often optimistic.
- Communication with MF customer service is not always great.

Some useful links:

<http://manilaforwarder.com/> (USA)

<http://indianabalikbayan.com/> (USA)

<http://www.balikbayan.de/English/about.htm> (Germany)

<http://www.lhiza.com/BalikBox.htm> (Germany)

<http://www.forexcargouk.com/> (UK)

www.balikbayan-box.co.uk (UK)

<http://umacargo.com> - (Hongkong, Macau, Singapore, Korea, Bangkok, Guam, Saipan, New Zealand, Canada, Europe and the Middle East)

*Kirsten Maher
Ayala Alabang, October 2008*

Balikbayan box

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia



A **balikbayan box** (literally *returnee's to one's homeland* box) is a ubiquitous cardboard box containing any number of small items and sent by an overseas Filipino known as a "balikbayan". Though often shipped by freight forwarders specializing in balikbayan boxes by sea, such boxes can be brought by Filipinos returning to the Philippines by air.

These boxes might contain nearly anything that can fit and that the sender thinks the recipient would like, regardless of whether those items can be bought cheaply in the Philippines, such as non-perishable food, toiletries, household items, electronics, toys, designer clothing, or items hard to find in the Philippines.

A balikbayan box intended for air travel is designed to conform to airline luggage restrictions and many Filipino stores carry them. Some boxes come with a cloth cover and side handles. Others are tightly secured with tape or rope, and thus not confused with an ordinary moving box more lightly wrapped.

Shipped boxes are delivered directly to the recipient, nearly always the family of the overseas Filipino.

Part of the attraction of the balikbayan box is economic. If the items were sent individually or in smaller boxes through postal services, the cost could be significant. The tradeoff is a long transit time by container ships, typically taking several weeks, and the lack of a solid delivery date.

Another part of the attraction is the cultural expectation that returning travelers will bring gifts to family, friends and colleagues left behind in the Philippines. In this way, it is related to the practice of "pasalubong".