

Mindoro



Mindoro is one of the least developed provinces in the Philippines, and its mostly-off-the-beaten-track combination of charm and challenge should satisfy the most intrepid of travellers.

Bisected by a virtually impassable mountain range – aptly named the High Rolling Mountains – rugged Mindoro is part tropical paradise, part provincial backwater. Forming a dramatic backdrop almost everywhere, the mountains also separate the island's two provinces: Mindoro Oriental to the east and Mindoro Occidental to the west.

The north coast of Mindoro Oriental hosts most of Mindoro's tourists. Here, just an easy few hours' travel from Manila, the dive resort towns around Puerto Galera are second to none. With white-sand beaches, secluded coves and tropical hideaways in a stunning harbour there is accommodation to suit everyone, from beachside shacks to world-class chic, and some of the Philippines' best diving around Sabang.

If you prefer remote to resort, simply venture southeast of Puerto, or virtually anywhere in Mindoro Occidental. It's hard going, but rewards for the bad roads, the indifferent food and the dust and grime include some unforgettable island-hopping and hiking near Sablayan – not to mention diving in pristine Apo Reef. Mangyan tribal culture is alive – sometimes even thriving – in parts of Mindoro, and provides a welcome change of pace and scene to the landscape for those travellers who seek it out.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Exploring the coves and beaches of **Puerto Galera** (p214) and diving its underwater wonders
- Learning about tribal life at the **Mangyan Heritage Center** (p222)
- Getting back to nature on pristine **North Pandan Island** (p225), gateway to the marine reserve of **Apo Reef Natural Park** (p226)
- Observing the head count of critically endangered *tamaraw* (native buffalo) at **Mt Iglit-Baco National Park** (p226)
- Discovering the unexpected attractions around **Sabluyan Prison Farm** (p225)
- Being the first person you know to island-hop the dive frontier of **Bulalacao** (p224)



Getting There & Away

AIR

Mindoro's only commercial airport is near San José, in little-travelled Mindoro Occidental. Cebu Pacific and PAL Express each fly daily to/from Manila (45 minutes). Zest Air flies to/from Manila four times a week.

BOAT

Unless you're chartering a plane or flying into San José, you will be coming to Mindoro by boat.

Luzon

The usual route to Mindoro is from Batangas, in southern Luzon, to Puerto Galera.

A convenient way which you can travel from Manila to Puerto Galera (via Batangas) is by the combined air-con bus and boat services of **Si-Kat** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 02-521 3344), which has a booking desk located both in Manila and at Muelle pier in the township of Puerto Galera. The Si-Kat boats departs from the Citystate Tower Hotel, which is located in A Mabini St in Ermita, Manila at 8am, connecting with pumpboats at Batangas at around 10.45am and arriving at Muelle pier at noon. Return trips depart from Muelle pier at 8am and arrive in Manila around 1pm. Si-Kat costs P700 one way. **Island Cruiser** (Map pp84-5; ☎ 523 8541; Swagman Travel, 411A Flores St, Ermita) also does the Manila to Puerto Galera trip for the same price.

For a little more trouble and less money, there is the option available for you to take a bus independently from Manila to Batangas pier (see p123), and then you can jump on a *bangka* (wooden outrigger boat). *Bangkas* leave regularly during the day until around 4pm, and you will find offices for all the main shipping lines situated at the Muelle pier.

For details of boat travel from Batangas to Calapan, Abra de Ilog and San José, refer to the Getting There & Away sections under each of these destinations in this chapter.

Some travellers have been scammed by touts at Batangas pier who'll claim that the last boat to Mindoro has just left, hoping that you'll charter one of their small, rickety and expensive outriggers. Even if it's late in the day, check with the ticket offices in the terminal building before resorting to a spe-

cial trip, as there are often late departures of passenger boats.

Marinduque

One or two daily *bangkas* leave around 11am from Pinamalayan (P150, 2½ hours) on Mindoro's southeast coast to Gasan.

Panay

From Roxas there are regular, round-the-clock car ferries to Caticlan (P220, four hours), the entry point for Boracay.

Romblon

A large *bangka* (P160, three hours) and/or a car ferry (P175, three hours) run most days between Roxas and Odiongan.

MINDORO ORIENTAL

Of the two provinces on the island, Mindoro Oriental is by far the wealthier and more populous. Calapan is its administrative capital, but of most interest to visitors is the group of resort towns from Sabang to Talipanan, collectively referred to as Puerto Galera.

Southeast of Puerto it's mostly small towns and narrow beaches. Resort owners are slowly buying up land near remote Bulalacao, on the southern tip of the island, which may just have the makings of a beach-and-diving resort.

PUERTO GALERA

☎ 043 / pop 28,035

Puerto Galera (pronounced *pwair-toe galair-ah*) is Spanish for 'port of the galleons'. Its deep natural harbour is sheltered on all sides, and was a favoured anchorage well before the Spanish arrived in 1572. It remains a favoured anchorage for long-term yachties as well as short-term vacationers.

And the short-termers – especially divers – come in droves. Just a few hours' travel time from Manila, this gorgeous collection of bays and islands is one of the country's top tourism destinations. The three main areas are Puerto Galera town, which is a collection of resorts situated around the beaches of Sabang, Small La Laguna and Big La Laguna (these three mercifully traffic free) in the northeast; and around White Beach, Aninuan and Talipanan to the west. Each