



Southeast Luzon

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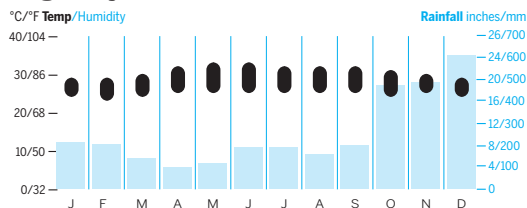
Why Go?

It's de rigueur in travel writing to describe a place as shaped like something – Vietnam is an oxbow, Thailand a kite. The crazy coastline of southeast Luzon is shaped like nothing, except maybe a mess. But what a beautiful mess. Between the dagger heights of volcanic Mt Mayon and the leviathan-studded sea depths near Donsol, there's a lot of variety here.

Plus: islands like Masbate and Catanduanes, where the pace of life is so slow as to be (cheerfully) comatose; the university-driven youth of Naga and the medieval Catholicism of Marinduque; surfing in Daet and limestone cliffs on the Caramoan Peninsula. And the food. Bicol brings the spice, and a welcome dash of taste, to the oft-bland Filipino table. Best of all, southeast Luzon is close enough to Manila to benefit from good infrastructure, but far enough away to feel removed from the capital region's grind.

When to Go

Naga City



Feb–Apr Good weather and festivals.

May–Jul This is generally a sunny (and hot!) time of year.

Nov–Jan Severe rains hit the Pacific Coast; Bicol has better weather and few tourists.

Climate

Southeast Luzon's wet season begins and ends a little later than in Manila and the rest of Luzon. It kicks in around late August and lasts until February, but rain is likely at any time of the year, especially on the eastern (Pacific) side. Typhoon season is July to November. Most typhoons pass by a couple of hundred kilometres offshore, but they occasionally make landfall on the eastern shore and regularly affect Catanduanes.

Getting There & Away

If you're coming from Manila, the best way to get to southeast Luzon is to take a comfortable 29-seat deluxe bus. These travel at night and cost only about P200 more than regular air-con buses. You can also fly to Naga, Legazpi, Catanduanes and Marinduque. See those sections for specifics.

The islands of Marinduque and Catanduanes are served by frequent ferries. You can also take ferries from Matnog, at the southern tip of Bicol, to Samar, and from Pilar, near Donsol, to Masbate. See those sections for details.

BICOL

Bicol technically includes Luzon's southeastern peninsula and the islands of Catanduanes and Masbate, but this section of the chapter covers peninsular Bicol only. Catanduanes (p175) and Masbate (p171) are covered in separate sections later in this chapter.

Daet & Bagasbas

 054 / POP 94,180

There's little to hold travellers in Daet (it kinda sounds like what to do when you want to lose weight) once the banking/internet chores are done (head for Vinzons Ave), but it's the access point for Bagasbas Beach, a laid-back surfer, barfly and karaoke-crooner hang-out 4km north of town.




Activities

Gorgeous **Bagasbas Beach** stretches for a couple of white sandy kilometres. The **surfing** is best when typhoons churn up the Pacific's waters between August and October, but fickle is a good word to describe the waves.

This is a good spot for newbie surfers, as waves are pretty small for much of the year. Instruction is available from any of the lo-

cal surfing whiz kids (P400 per hour). Fair warning: while these kids can surf, their English skills aren't always great, so you may want to shop around until you find an instructor you're comfortable communicating with. That said, the locals here are beyond friendly; this is one of those places where we've seen them happily inviting international travellers over for lunch, drinks, etc.

There are equipment rental shacks all along the beach; the going rate for a surfboard is P200/hr. It can be rippy here – take care when swimming. If you're interested in kiteboarding (think wakeboarding, except you use a kite instead of a boat to propel you forward), head to **Mike's Kites** ( 0921 457 2299, 0919 209 9191; www.mikes-kites.com; 2hr into US\$60; 1-day kiteboard rental US\$20) run by American Mike Gambrell, alongside a restaurant/bar of the same name.


Speaking of nightlife, Bagasbas is known as one of the videoke capitals of the country, which is pretty full-on considering that the bar strip is just 500m long. The beach is dead as a dodo until about 4pm weekdays, then crazy busy until about 4am; weekends are lively 24/7.

Sleeping & Eating

On Bagasbas Beach, **Kusina ni Angel** is still going strong. Run by the charming Angel de la Cruz, it has a creative menu specialising in seafood with a decent veg selection – the okra and eggplant is good. **Catherine's** restaurant is a buzzing spot overlooking the beach, but we think it's a bit overpriced.

Zenaida's Palace

HOTEL \$\$

( 0921 224 0461, 441 6286; james_auro@yahoo.com; s/d P600/1200; ) The friendly owner of the 'palace' has turned her yellow-and-white house with tiled floors and clean rooms into a good value midrange surfer spot.



Mike's Kites

FILIPINO \$\$

( 0919 209 9191; www.mikes-kites.com; Bagasbas Rd; air-con/fan bungalow P1200/800, s/d hut P300/500; ) The bar/restaurant is a good spot for Western and Filipino food, beer and the chance to meet travellers, expats and the Filipinos who love them. The on-site bungalows and native huts are good value.

Bagasbas Surfer's Diner

HOMESTAY \$

( 0916 475 9053; r with fan/air-con P500/1000; ) In Bagasbas a few houses offer homestays – ask around or look for signs – or stay in the clean and simple rooms behind the