

# › Understand the Philippines

## **THE PHILIPPINES TODAY.....406**

The country's new president is creating a buzz, but will his popularity last?

## **HISTORY .....408**

As the saying goes, the Philippines spent 400 years in a convent followed by 50 years in Hollywood.

## **CULTURE.....416**

From cockfighting to Catholicism, we have the culture covered.

## **FOOD & DRINK.....422**

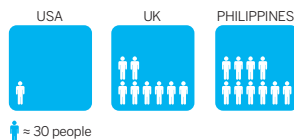
The country may not be a foodie haven but the cuisine is better than its reputation.

## **ENVIRONMENT.....429**

A look at the environmental highlights and lowlights of one of the most biodiverse places on the planet.



## population per sq km



# The Philippines Today

## A New Era?

The first decade of the 21st century was a tumultuous one in Philippine politics. It began with an impeachment trial that saw millions of Filipinos take to the streets to oust President Joseph Estrada over corruption allegations – the country's second 'People Power' revolution in 15 years. Estrada gave way to his vice president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, whose nearly 10 years in office were also dogged by scandals, including one concerning alleged improprieties in her 2004 re-election.

As we went to press, Arroyo had just been arrested on charges that she tampered with the results of subsequent congressional elections in 2007.

In the 2010 presidential elections, the country found the fresh face it was looking for in the form of Benigno Aquino III, the squeaky-clean son of Corazon Aquino, hero of the first People Power revolution in 1986. Riding a wave of national grief after his mother's death in 2009, Aquino emerged from a pack of candidates and won in a landslide victory.

The early returns on Aquino's first six-year term have been positive. Analysts have lauded his willingness to tackle corruption and interest groups. But two crucial issues promise to test Aquino's political will: the 'Maguindanao Massacre' trial, and the Reproductive Health Bill.

## The Maguindanao Massacres & the Media

It was the election-related crime that shocked the world: in the run-up to the 2010 gubernatorial elections in Maguindanao, Mindanao, 58 people were gunned down at a campaign event for an opposition candidate. Thirty-four of the victims were members of the media.

The alleged perpetrators were associated with the region's dominant Ampatuan clan, led by patriarch and incumbent governor (at the time)

» President Benigno Aquino is the son of 11th president Corazon Aquino

» The previous (14th) president, Gloria Arroyo, is the daughter of 9th president Diosdado Macapagal

» 12th President Fidel Ramos is Ferdinand Marcos' second cousin

## Faux Pas

» Don't lose your temper – Filipinos will think you're *loco loco* (crazy).

» When engaged in karaoke (and trust us, you will be), don't insult the guy who sounds like a chicken getting strangled, lest it be taken the wrong way.

» Abstain from grabbing that last morsel on the communal food platter – your hosts might think you're a pauper.

» Don't complain about neighbours getting cozy with you on jeepneys – space is meant to be shared.

## Top Films

» **Imelda** (2004) Fascinating look into the psyche of Imelda Marcos.

» **Kubrador** (2006) Top actress Gina Pareño stars in this film about an illegal numbers game.

» **Serbis** (2008) Critically acclaimed film about a family-run porn-movie house in Angeles.