



# North Luzon

## Includes ➔

Iba & Botolan .....	114
San Juan (La Union) ...	117
Ilocos .....	119
Vigan .....	119
Laoag .....	124
Pagudpud & Around ...	126
Baguio .....	128
Kabayan .....	136
Bontoc .....	142
Banaue .....	146
Kiangan .....	151
Baler & Around .....	153
Tuguegarao .....	156
Batanes .....	158

## Best Off the Beaten Track

- ➔ Sierra Madre (p155)
- ➔ Babuyan Islands (p160)
- ➔ Itbayat Island (p162)
- ➔ Adams (p128)

## Best for Indigenous Culture

- ➔ Kalinga Province (p144)
- ➔ Sabtang Island (p161)
- ➔ Timbac Caves (p137)
- ➔ Echo Valley Hanging Coffins (p138)
- ➔ Bontoc Museum (p142)

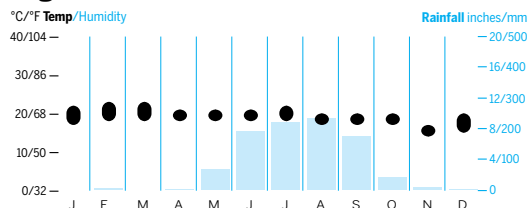
## Why Go?

North Luzon, a region that invites intrepid exploration, encapsulates a nation in miniature. Machete-toting mountain tribes who are quick to smile and quicker to share their rice wine. Surfers racing waves onto sunny beaches. White-sand beaches lapped by teal waters. Impenetrable jungle hiding numerous endemic critters. Spanish colonial cities where sunlight breaks through seashell windows. Far-flung islands whose pristine landscapes greet very few visitors.

For many travellers, the main lures are the emerald rice terraces of the Cordillera, a mountain range that hides hanging coffins, mummified ancestors and the old ghosts of the forest. Trekking is a prime activity in this wild frontier, but caving, mountain biking and rafting are other adrenalin-fuelled activities that shape the experience of exploring North Luzon. Culturally, this is the Philippines at its most diverse, as the peoples of the mountains, Zambales, Ilocos and Batanes are notable for a mind-boggling melange of language and ritual.

## When to Go

### Sagada



**Nov–May** A nice time to experience the best weather the Philippines has to offer – you won't be alone!

**Apr–Jul** The heat is on but the crowds are down.

**Jul–Oct** Rice terraces are green, but typhoons can be a problem.

## Language

Myriad languages are spoken in North Luzon, including dozens of dialects in the Cordillera alone. The language jumble is most confusing in Kalinga, where just about every village has its own dialect. In the Cordillera, people are far more likely to understand Ilocano or English than the national language, Tagalog.

In the lowlands, the principal languages are Tagalog and Ilocano, which is the predominant language not only in Ilocos but also in Cagayan, Isabela and La Union. Other common dialects include Pangasinan and Sambal, the language of the Zambales people, while the people of the Batanes speak Ivatan.

## Getting There & Away

Regular flights connect Manila with Laoag, Tuguegarao, and Basco (Batanes); Tuguegarao with Basco, Palalan and Maconacon, and Cauayan (Isabela Province) with Palalan and Maconacon. Air-con buses link Manila with the major North Luzon cities, including comfortable deluxe buses to Laoag, Vigan, Pagudpud and Baguio.

Luzon's more remote regions, such as the Cordillera and the northeast part of the island, are also very reachable by an assortment of reasonably frequent public transport. If driving off the beaten track, keep in mind that you'll need a pretty good 4WD, and some of the roads that cut through the Kalinga Province are not for the faint of heart. Lack of parking spots and traffic jams are a common problem in most cities and towns. You can rent cars in Manila.

## ZAMBALES COAST


The Zambales Coast lies between a rock and a wet place. The rock? The angry masonry of Mt Pinatubo. The wet? Well, the sea of course, with some fine surfing (especially around Pundaquit and Liwa), and often as not the rains that unrelentingly lash this 100km of coastline every summer. Outside this season you'll find uninhabited offshore islands and beach resorts, popular as offbeat weekend getaways with folks from Manila.

## Pundaquit, Capones Island & Liwliwa

 047 / POP 2670

Just a three-hour drive from Manila you can sleep under the stars on hourglass-shaped Capones Island, a 20- to 30-minute bangka (outrigger canoe) ride from the small fishing

village of Pundaquit. During the rainy season boats can't land, so you have to be able to swim to shore and then back to the boat to get picked up. Hiring a bangka for a day of island-hopping is around P1300.

July to October are the peak months for surfing, but decent swells linger into February. March to May is the flat season. The best spots are the south side of Capones Island, Anawangin Cove (south of Pundaquit) and San Narciso (7km north of San Antonio). Anawangin Cove is accessible only on foot or by boat. Part evangelical retreat, part surf camp, **Crystal Beach Resort & Campsite** ( 047-913 4309; [www.crystalbeach.com.ph](http://www.crystalbeach.com.ph); d from P1550) in San Narciso has Zambales' steadiest waves, boards for rent (P200 per hour) and surfing instruction (P200 per hour).


Another wonderful spot for surfing is Liwliwa, a beautiful stretch of volcanic-pumice-strewn beach just south of San Felipe, which is 5km north of San Narciso, and a corner of Luzon that still very much retains a chilled out backpacker vibe.

## Sleeping & Eating

Beach resorts in Zambales go into hibernation during low season (June to October), while the basic surfer digs come into their own during that time.


### ★ Circle Hostel

HOSTEL \$

( 0917 861 1929; [www.zambales.thecirclehostel.com](http://www.zambales.thecirclehostel.com); tent P300, hammock P350, dm P450) This original, colourful backpacker/surfer hostel in Liwliwa is a great place to connect with a young crowd of fellow wave riders and make friends with the lovely staff. Lodgings consist of varying levels of shoestringiness, with the thatch-walled, breezy dorms being the upmarket option. Lockers are available and the vibe encourages lingering, in and out of the sea.




### Kilabot Surfing

BEACH RESORT \$

( 0930 509 5122; huts P800) If you've come to Liwliwa to surf but want your own space, these basic beachside *kubos* (thatched huts) are the answer.

### Norma Beach Resort

BEACH RESORT \$\$

( 0910 948 8607, 0918 361 5924; d from P1650, huts P750;  ) Norma's is a collection of thatch-roofed beach huts behind a bamboo stockade. The small cheapies are seriously basic. Located on lovely Anawangin Cove on the far side of Pundaquit; speak with the owners about arranging bangka transport.