

Understand the Philippines

THE PHILIPPINES TODAY..... 414

Never-ending political scandals, disaster recovery and geopolitics dominate the headlines.

HISTORY 416

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

PEOPLE & CULTURE 424

From karaoke and cover bands to folk dancing and Catholicism, we have the culture covered.

FOOD & DRINK..... 430

Rich regional traditions and a complexity often overlooked, Filipino cuisine is the tie that binds.

ENVIRONMENT..... 436

Incredible biodiversity and immense environmental pressures go hand in hand: a look at the highlights and challenges.

The Philippines Today

Mega-malls metastasize while downtown streets flood. Macau-like casinos open up in Manila while tribes skirmish in Kalinga. Deep poverty persists while the overall economy booms. Politics and corruption go together like rum and karaoke. Storms – both weather related and of the international-diplomatic variety – come in waves. Through it all, ordinary Filipinos pull through, recover, embrace their loved ones and hope for better times ahead.

Best on Film

Norte, the End of History (2014)

A character's struggle against an inexorable tide of forces; an epic masterpiece.

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

Metro Manila (2013) Part twisty, crime drama; part immersive look at the big city.

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

Best in Print

Pacific Rims: Beermen Ballin' in Flip-Flops and the Philippines' Unlikely Love Affair with Basketball (Rafe Bartholomew) As riotous as the title implies.

Playing with Water – Passion and Solitude on a Philippine Island (James Hamilton-Paterson) This timeless account of life on a remote islet sheds much light on Filipino culture.

The Tesseract (Alex Garland) A thrilling romp through Manila's dark side by the author of the cult backpacker hit, *The Beach*.

Scandals

Known by acronyms like DAP or single-word appellations like Nopales or Malampaya, political-corruption scandals are to the Philippines what football is to Brazilians – a lens through which to interpret the national character. Even while former president Arroyo (and current Congressional representative) is under 'hospital arrest' awaiting a resolution of charges of plunder, talk of impeaching President Aquino was banded about in the summer of 2014. A flurry of accusations surrounding the Disbursement Acceleration Program (DAP) – essentially a way for Aquino to bypass the legislature and, according to him, fast track a much needed stimulus package – was coming to a head. In a discouraging tit-for-tat Aquino threatened to impeach the Supreme Court justices who ruled DAP unconstitutional.

Before DAP, confidence in Aquino had already diminished thanks to a series of high-profile events including the Zamboanga siege; attack on farm workers at Hacienda Lucita; the Luneta hostage taking; the handling of relief operations after the Bohol earthquake and Typhoon Haiyan (known locally as Typhoon Yolanda); cuts in social services; and a failure to meet expectations in improving transportation and power infrastructure. Aquino is not the only figure embroiled in scandals, however. The ongoing Nopales investigation, in which an influential businesswoman is accused of channeling kickbacks to prominent opposition leaders, is a smorgasbord of wrongdoing.

Resistance Movements

Some of the longest lasting resistance movements in the world, of indigenous peoples and communist and Muslim rebel groups, continue to fracture society. While most actual fighting doesn't impact the daily lives of ordinary urban Filipinos, newspaper headlines tell a story