



# Philippines

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## Best Beaches

- » Boracay (p578)
- » Malapascua (p590)
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- » Sipalay (p583)
- » Alona Beach (p592)

## Best Places for Cultural Connections

- » Bontoc (p569)
- » Vigan (p570)
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- » Baguio (p567)
- » Siquijor (p584)

## Why Go?

Just when you thought you had Asia figured out, you get to the Philippines. Instead of monks you have priests; instead of *túk-túk* you have tricycles; instead of *pho* you have *adobo*. At first glance the Philippines will disarm you more than charm you, but peel back the country's skin and there are treasures to be found – aplenty. Just for starters, you can swim with whale sharks, scale volcanoes, explore desert islands, gawk at ancient rice terraces, submerge at world-class dive sites and venture into rainforests to visit remote hill tribes.

Beyond its obvious physical assets, the Philippines possesses a quirky streak that takes a bit longer to appreciate. There are secret potions and healing lotions, guys named Bong and girls named Bing, grinning hustlers, deafening cock farms, wheezing *bangkas* (outrigger boats), crooked politicians, fuzzy carabao (water buffalo), graffiti-splashed jeepneys and cheap beer to enjoy as you take it all in.

## When to Go

### Manila

°C/°F Temp

40/104 —

30/86 —

20/68 —

10/50 —

0/32 —

J F M A M J J A S O N D

Rainfall inches/mm

— 20/500

— 16/400

— 12/300

— 8/200

— 4/100

— 0

**Jan–Feb** Cool, pleasant weather & height of the festival season.

**Apr** Easter festivals; best time for whale-shark-spotting in Donsol.

**Sep** Typhoons are a surfer's delight; low-season deals on beaches.

## AT A GLANCE

- » **Currency** Peso (P)
- » **Languages** Tagalog (Pilipino), English
- » **Money** ATMs abound in cities, scarce in remote areas
- » **Visas** Visas on arrival (21-days) the norm
- » **Mobile Phones** Local SIM cards essentially free

## Fast Facts

- » **Area** 300,000 sq km
- » **Capital** Manila
- » **Country Code** 63
- » **Emergency** 117

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	45P
Euro zone	€1	55P
Japan	¥100	50P
Thailand	B1	1.40P
UK	UK£1	70P
US	US\$1	45P

## Set Your Budget

- » **Budget hotel room**  
\$US11.38
- » **Litre of bottled water**  
\$US0.68
- » **Two-tank scuba dive**  
\$US54.64
- » **One-way domestic flight**  
\$US22.50–45.50
- » **Short taxi ride** \$US1.37

## Entering the Country

Entering the country is straightforward and usually done by air through Manila, Cebu or Clark Airport.

## Don't Miss

Filipinos revel in colourful **fiestas**, and it's worth scheduling your travels around one. The granddaddy of them all is the **Ati-Atihan** (p578) festival in Kalibo. At Bacolod's (p582) **MassKara** festival, mischievous masked men stir the masses into a dancing frenzy every October. The Easter **crucifixion ceremony** in San Fernando, north of Manila, produces a more macabre tableau, with Catholic devotees being physically nailed to crosses. Every little town holds a fiesta, so your odds of seeing one are pretty good.

The Filipino *joie de vivre* manifests itself in other ways – namely, singing. A **karaoke** night out in Manila is essential. Or pay homage to Filipino cover bands worldwide with some **live music**. Cover-band shows in Malate can be lively, or head up to Quezon City or Makati for more original fare.

## ITINERARIES

### One Week

Beach bums and divers should select a Visayan island and go. Popular, easy-to-reach picks include Bohol, with its mix of marine and terrestrial attractions; well-rounded Southern Negros; and adventure-laden North-east Mindanao. Kitesurfers and hedonists should plot a course towards Boracay. If mountains are your thing, do the spectacular North Luzon overland loop from Baguio to Sagada to Banaue and back to Manila.

### Two Weeks

Spend a day exploring Manila, then complete the North Luzon loop. Fly from Manila to Coron in northern Palawan for some island hopping, then make the stunning eight-hour sea journey to El Nido, gateway to cliff-added Bacuit Bay. Travel overland to Puerto Princesa, taking maximum time to linger on lonely beaches along Palawan's west coast. From Puerto, fly back to Manila or Cebu to catch your onward flight.

## Essential Outdoor Activities

- » **Whale Sharks** Snorkeling with the gentle *butanding* of Donsol is the quintessential Philippine adventure.
- » **Samar Caving** Deck yourself out in full caving regalia before dodging stalactites, slithering through crevasses and swimming in crisp underground pools.
- » **Cagayan de Oro rafting** The whitewater around this northern Mindanao adventure hotbed is surprisingly brisk and can be paddled year round.
- » **Boracay Kitesurfing** Bulabog Beach's shallow lagoon is perfect for learning, while stiff winds from December to March challenge experts.
- » **Siargao Surfing** Tackle the Philippines' ultimate wave, Cloud Nine.