



# Philippines

63 / POP 106 MILLION

## Includes ➔

Manila .....	549
North Luzon .....	563
Southeast Luzon ...	569
Mindoro .....	572
The Visayas .....	575
Mindanao .....	593
Palawan .....	596
Understand Philippines .....	602
Survival Guide .....	606

## Best Beaches

- ➔ Boracay (p576)
- ➔ Malapascua (p590)
- ➔ Sabang (p573)
- ➔ Sipalay (p582)
- ➔ Alona Beach (p593)

## Best Places for Cultural Connections

- ➔ Bontoc (p567)
- ➔ Vigan (p568)
- ➔ Quiapo (p561)
- ➔ Banaue (p567)
- ➔ Siquijor (p583)

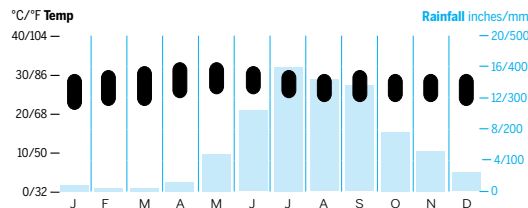
## Why Go?

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* (soup) 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. 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



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

**Apr** Easter festivals and the best time for whale-shark spotting.

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

## AT A GLANCE

- ➔ **Currency** Peso (P)
- ➔ **Languages** Tagalog (Filipino), English
- ➔ **Money** ATMs abound in cities, scarce in remote areas
- ➔ **Visas** Visa waivers on arrival (30 days) the norm
- ➔ **Mobile phones** Prepaid SIM cards are cheap and easy to get

## Fast Facts

- ➔ **Area** 300,000 sq km
- ➔ **Capital** Manila
- ➔ **Emergency** ☎ 117

## Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	P40
Euro Zone	€1	P60
Malaysia	RM1	P15
Thailand	10B	P15
UK	UK£1	P75
USA	US\$1	P45

## Set Your Budget

- ➔ **Budget hotel room** US\$10
- ➔ **Bottle of San Miguel beer** US\$0.60
- ➔ **Two-tank scuba dive** US\$50
- ➔ **Short taxi ride** US\$2

## Entering the Country

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

## Don't Miss

Filipino revel in colourful fiestas, and it's worth scheduling your travels around one. The granddaddy of them all is the Ati-Atihan festival in Kalibo. At Bacolod's 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 just fly there. Popular, easy-to-reach picks include Bohol, with its mix of marine and terrestrial attractions; well-rounded southern Negros; and Cebu island, which has a little of everything. 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 eight-hour sea voyage to El Nido, gateway to cliff-adddled Bacuit Bay. Travel overland to Puerto Princesa, taking maximum time to linger on lonely beaches along Palawan's west coast.

## Essential Outdoor Activities

- ➔ **Whale Sharks** Snorkelling with the gentle *butanding* of Donsol is the quintessential Philippine adventure.
- ➔ **Sagada Caving** Dodge stalactites, slither through crevasses and swim in crisp underground pools on the thrilling cave connection.
- ➔ **Malapascua Diving** Drop onto Monad Shoal to view thresher sharks by morning and manta rays by day.
- ➔ **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.