



Philippines

63 / POP 106 MILLION

Includes ➔

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Best Beaches

- ➔ Boracay (p573)
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- ➔ Panglao Island (p589)
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Best Places for Culture

- ➔ Vigan (p567)
- ➔ Manila (p547)
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- ➔ Siquijor (p580)
- ➔ Sagada (p564)

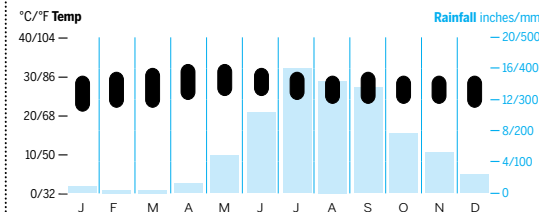
Why Go?

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 aplenty to be found. For starters, you can explore desert islands, scale volcanoes, gawk at ancient rice terraces, submerge at world-class dive sites, and venture deep into the mountains to visit remote 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, 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 & May Peak time for Donsol whale sharks, and relatively flat seas for boat travel.

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, but are scarce in remote areas

Visas Visa waivers on arrival (30 days) the norm

Mobile phones Prepaid SIM cards are easy to procure

Fast Facts

Area 300,000 sq km

Capital Manila

Emergency ☎117

Exchange Rates

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

Daily Costs

Dorm bed P450

Bottle of San Miguel beer
P40

Two-tank scuba dive
P2500

Short taxi ride P60

Entering the Country

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

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 festival in Kalibo. Cebu's Sinulog Festival sees revelers dancing a unique two-steps-forward, one-step-back shuffle, while Baguio's Panagbenga involves a grand procession of floral floats. 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* also manifests itself in other ways – namely, singing. A karaoke night out 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 with its thresher sharks and sardines. 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-addled 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 Don-
sol 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.