

Destination Philippines

The Philippines has always been Southeast Asia's odd child. Catholic, carefree and cast away from its neighbours both geographically and culturally, the country confounds first-time visitors and veteran observers alike. Yet when travellers do first set foot in this enchantingly enigmatic country, more often than not they are pleasantly surprised.

It's not hard to see why. Let's start with obvious: countless isolated beaches, reefs, mountains and islands, the odd backpacker Shangri-La, and a little island called Boracay. Then there's the not-so-obvious: the fascinating, often tragic, past and its ghosts; the indigenous cultures and artefacts; Manila's quiet rise to culinary distinction; and the ever-relaxed, happy-go-lucky people.

The latter is what ultimately hooks people on the Philippines. It's more than just the hospitality of the locals. It's *bahala na* – the whatever-will-be-will-be Filipino attitude – which captivates and ultimately ensnares visitors. *Bahala na* leads the soft-spoken Filipino to be generally happy, to splash jeepneys with colourful graffiti, to laugh in the face of misfortune and to come up with names for themselves like Bing, Bong and Honey. Many arrive expecting the country to be 'dangerous', to discover instead a land of shiny happy people. When everybody's smiling like it's going out of style, how can you not enjoy the place?

The country has its problems, to be sure. Manila especially has grinding poverty befitting a teeming Asian megalopolis of almost 12 million. Filipinos pollute like they smile – copiously. What rules there are against smoke belchers, illegal loggers, toxic-waste spillers and other menaces to the environment are enforced selectively, if at all – the government is perceived as among the world's most corrupt, according to Transparency International, an NGO addressing corruption, and other watchdogs.

It's not particularly *bahala na* to get all indignant about corruption, or about anything else for that matter (it's been observed that foreigners have a monopoly on complaining in the Philippines). How surprising, then, that one of the 20th century's great acts of indignation was orchestrated by Filipinos. The People Power revolution that overthrew Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 was the world's first successful 'bloodless revolution'. It worked so well they did it again, in 2001, deposing film-star-cum-president Joseph Estrada, who had been accused of involvement in an illegal gambling ring. Now the country is ruled by diminutive Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, the country's second female president in 20 years. The first was Cory Aquino, who succeeded Marcos and was Asia's first democratically elected female president.

So there's been some heady stuff going on in the Philippines. Why, then, does it remain so poorly understood? Describing the country is like trying to pick up a bar of soap in the bath: you may come close to grasping it, but it always seems to elude you. The Americans have something to do with it. Ruled by the United States for 45 years, the Philippines maintains a close spiritual bond with its former colonial master. The US military had several huge bases here for almost a half-century after the Philippines achieved true independence after WWII. While the last bases closed in 1992, American military units were quietly allowed back in on training missions less than a decade later. Today they continue to train Filipino troops fighting in the restive southern region of Mindanao.

The US legacy arguably looms even larger than that of Spain, the Philippines' original colonisers who ruled the country for 350 years. With the notable exception of the Spanish clergy, which was busy sowing the

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seeds of Catholicism in what today is the second largest predominantly Catholic country on earth, Spain didn't pay all that much attention to the Philippines (see p31). The US, on the other hand, paid a whole lot of attention: teaching English, building roads and establishing education and political systems that survive to this day (see p34). The US is also the inspiration for the Philippine film industry and many of its most popular TV shows – reality TV shows, both American and locally produced – are *huge* here.

But to call the country 'Americanised' would be an oversimplification. Indeed, the country won't seem Americanised at all if you happen to be trekking amid indigenous tribes deep in the mountains of Mindanao or North Luzon. English is alive and well in the posh districts of Manila, but in the provinces people speak one (or two, or three) of the more than 165 languages spoken here. The further off the beaten track you go, the less likely you are to be understood in English. Far from being a pattern, the country's American streak is but one of many classic Filipino 'quirks'.

The list of quirks goes on. There's that name thing. Names we've liked over the years include Cute, Boy-Boy, Luzviminda (for LUzon, VISayas, MINDAnao) and the ever-popular Jejomar (JESus, JOSEph and MARY). The world got a chuckle when one of Filipino seamen kidnapped by Somali pirates in 2008 was named Chivas Regal. The son of Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos goes by Bong-Bong. Even the country's most prominent Muslim rebel group has a quirky name – the MILF, short for Moro Islamic Liberation Front (pronounce the letters individually – M-I-L-F – to say it correctly).

Then there's that gambling thing, which brought down Estrada. Filipinos love to gamble, especially on the national past time, cockfighting. But they are ambivalent about it, as the downfall of Estrada made clear, and talking about gambling in public is decidedly taboo. Cockfighting, incidentally, isn't taboo, at least among the vast majority of Filipinos. In the provinces, men stroll around cradling their prized fighting cocks as casually as they might cradle a bottle of beer.

Long-time Asia hands might consider the Philippines' overwhelming Catholicism another quirk, as it's certainly un-Asian. The Church heavily influences politics and shapes conservative attitudes toward family planning in this rapidly growing country (the population went from 76.5 million to 88.6 million between 2000 and 2007). Business, meanwhile, is dominated by the mestizo descendants of 19th-century Chinese immigrants.

Combine three and a half centuries of Spanish rule with some heavy American influence, add a dash of Chinese savvy, thrown in a few quirks and regional differences and voila! you get the Philippines. Despite all the outside influences, today the country is very much its own unique entity – and one that travellers are finally starting to take note of. Official statistics say tourist arrivals are way up in recent years, and casual observation seems to back that up. But tourist arrivals are still a mere trickle compared to what neighbouring countries like Thailand and Vietnam get. At certain times of the year it will feel like you have 7000 tropical islands all to yourself. Sounds like a tempting proposition.

FAST FACTS

Population: 96 million

Life expectancy: men 68 years, women 74 years

GDP: US\$300 billion

Literacy rate: 93%

Number of islands: 7011, the world's second-largest archipelago

Highest point: Mt Apo (2954m)

Asia's firsts: university (University of Santo Tomas, 1611); democratic nation (1898); commercial airline (Philippine Airlines, 1941)

World's biggest: producer of coconuts

World's smallest: hoofed mammal, the Palawan mouse deer

World's third largest: English-speaking country

Getting Started

There's no question that the Philippines is a little more challenging to visit than some other Southeast Asian countries. For starters, it's separated from the Southeast Asian mainland by several hundred kilometres of ocean. Then there's the relative lack of tourist infrastructure compared to its neighbours. The so-called 'backpacker trail' has yet to find its way to the Philippines. But that's all part of the appeal for many travellers, and those who make the effort to get to the Philippines tend to be pleasantly surprised. The people here are as warm and friendly as you'll meet anywhere, and the island and mountain vistas are truly superb – some of the best in the region. And with over 7000 islands in the archipelago, it's easy to get that off-the-beaten-track feeling, something that's getting harder to do in most other parts of Southeast Asia.

WHEN TO GO

Any time is a good time to visit the Philippines, with the possible exception of Holy Week (around Easter), when hotels book out months in advance and prices triple. New Year's sees a similar hotel crunch in popular spots like Boracay, but the parties make it worthwhile. Also be aware that during typhoon season (June to early December), tropical storms raging up the east coast can mean foul weather for days, but there's not much you can do to predict typhoons. Adopt the Filipino maxim – *bahala na* (whatever will be will be) – and wait it out.

The Philippines' weather has become more unpredictable in recent years, but January to May usually brings the best weather to most of the country. However, this is also the high tourist season. Foreign arrivals are highest in January to March, while Filipinos hit the road en masse in April and May for their 'summer' holidays. Don't worry too much about crowds though; outside of a few popular beach resorts it's never very hard to escape other tourists in the Philippines. Low season is during the 'rainy' months of June to September, which in some areas of the country aren't rainy at all. Accommodation prices usually decrease during this time.

COSTS & MONEY

There's a great debate raging over which country is more expensive, the Philippines or Thailand. The consensus is that accommodation is slightly more expensive in the Philippines, while food and especially beer are more expensive in Thailand. Whatever, both countries are mercifully affordable by Western standards.

If you're on a tight budget, figure on US\$4 to US\$8 per day for accommodation, and about the same for food and drink (less if you can live on street food alone, more if you're a 10-beer-a-day drinker). Transport is absurdly cheap – public transport costs US\$0.15 on average, an hour bus trip US\$1, an overnight bus trip US\$10. Add in sundries and you're looking at US\$15 to US\$20 per day. These projections go up slightly if you're in Manila, Cebu or touristy beaches like Boracay or Alona Beach.

At the midrange and top-end you can spend as much as you want. Heck, spend US\$1000 a day – we won't mind. For detailed information on accommodation prices and some suggestions on which top-end resorts might be worthy of your hard-earned cash, turn to p429.

Private boat and car hire are also great bargains; you can rent a van with driver for the day for about US\$30 excluding petrol (again, higher in Manila);

See Climate Charts (p434) for more information.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Travelling light is the only way to travel in the Philippines. Let's face it: unless you intend to engage in specialist activities like surfing or rock climbing, a mid-sized backpack should suffice. And, if you decide that you really should have brought that chess set, ham radio or three-piece suit, well, you can always buy anything you need in Manila or Cebu. There are just a few things we recommend that you don't leave home without...

- A headlamp or torch (electricity is an on-again-off-again affair in the Philippines)
- A sarong (this will double as a sheet, beach towel or shawl)
- A pullover (fleece) for those ridiculously cold air-con buses and ferries
- Earplugs (roosters are everywhere in the Philippines, and you'll also have to deal with karaoke, noisy boat engines and so on)
- A mask and snorkel (worthwhile if doing lots of snorkelling to save on hiring costs and to ensure quality)
- A strong zip-lock bag or other fully waterproof container for your camera (useful on boat rides)
- Tampons
- Good sports bra (for those jolting rides on rough roads)
- Medication if you suffer from sea sickness

motorbike rental should cost no more than US\$10 daily. Price wars have driven domestic airfares down to US\$50 to US\$75 for a one-way flight just about anywhere (higher on some less travelled routes).

TRAVELLING RESPONSIBLY

Explosive population growth is exacting a huge toll on the Philippines' few remaining old-growth forests, coral reefs and other resources. A number of sustainable eco- and adventure-tourism initiatives counteract this trend by encouraging alternative livelihoods and preservation of the country's natural bounties. The most high-profile example is swimming with the whale sharks in Donsol (p200): many butanding (whale shark) interaction officers and spotters employed by this programme are former fishermen who once hunted whale sharks and dynamite-fished on the local reefs.

Similar grassroots ecotourism initiatives have sprouted up across the country, usually run by small-scale (often one-person) tour companies. These companies take travellers into some of the country's most remote areas to experience caving, diving, trekking and a number of other activities that rely directly on the continued health of local ecosystems, and so have a vested interest in carrying out these activities sustainably. Examples include caving in Samar and around Tuguegarao, rafting in Kalinga Province and Cagayan de Oro, rappelling on Camiguin island, trekking in the Cordillera Mountains and dolphin-watching near Pamilican Island off Bohol. Few of these ecotourism initiatives receive any support from the Department of Tourism, which these days is focused more on attracting Chinese and Korean tourists to a handful of new casino complexes and mainstream resorts like Boracay.

We still love Boracay, but let's face it, unchecked development and explosive tourism growth aren't doing its environment any favours. Consider adding a few more less touristy areas to your itinerary – and patronising some of the grassroots ecotourism initiatives listed in this book while you're at it. The local communities served by these initiatives will be grateful for your dollars.

HOW MUCH?

Internet access
(per hour) P30

Laundry (1kg) P35

One-day bangka (small
boat) rental P1500-2000

One-hour fast ferry P220

Shampoo (bottle) P50

TOP PICKS

PHILIPPINES

Philippine
Sea

ISLANDS & BEACHES

Lose yourself on your own private island, party it up in Boracay or keep it mellow at a low-key dive resort. With 7000 islands, there's a patch of sand for everyone.

- White Beach on Boracay is the heavily made-up reigning queen of the Philippines' resorts (p285)
- The Bacuit Archipelago is one of the world's most stunning seascapes (p420)
- The Romblon Islands are where natural wonders seem to be for your eyes only (p264)
- Sipalay is a remote town featuring idyllic Sugar Beach, the perfect beach retreat (p309)
- Malapascua Island is a laid-back diving resort on the verge of big things (p253)
- The Calamian Group has lovely Robinson Crusoe islands and great wreck diving (p422)
- Siquijor is a lovely island with a little of everything – caves, diving, gorgeous beaches and a great ring-road for cruisin' (p317)
- Camiguin Island is a volcanic wonderland for X-Gamers and retirees alike (p368)

FESTIVALS

Filipinos don't need much of an excuse to hold a colourful fiesta, and it's worth trying to schedule your travels around a few of the big ones (see also p22). These are our favourites.

- The Ati-Atihan festival rocks the streets of Kalibo in January (p294)
- Easter in San Fernando has a ceremony where volunteers are nailed to a cross (p131)
- The raucous Moriones Festival livens up sleepy Marinduque every Holy Week (p209)
- During Pahiyas on 15 May, Lucban residents decorate their houses with fruit and vegetables and wild paper creations (p126)
- Witness Cebu City's Sinulog Fiesta, celebrated on the third Sunday of January (p238)
- Masked men stir locals into a dancing frenzy at Bacolod's October MassKara Festival (p301)
- The Kaamulan festival each February celebrates indigenous tribal unity and culture in the little-visited region of Bukidon (p367)
- The Peñafrancia Festival in Naga draws hordes of people every September (p189)

ECO-FRIENDLY EXPERIENCES

Twenty years of environmental plunder followed by 20 years of environmental indifference did the local ecology no favours. Today Filipinos are more aware of the benefits of conservation and ecotourism.

- Snorkel with whale sharks, with former whale-shark hunters as your guide, at Donsol (p200)
- Hop on a live-aboard for a dive safari to the protected coral reefs of Tubbataha (p427) and Apo Reef (p226)
- Spend a few nights in a small rural community in southern Palawan or go dolphin-spotting through Puerto Princesa's Pasyar Developmental Tourism (p403)
- Check out humane zoos housing rescued animals, such as Botolan Wildlife Farm (p137) and Palawan Wildlife Rescue & Conservation Center (p405)
- Bunk down amid organic gardens at the Bohol Bee Farm, supporting sustainable agriculture and beekeeper livelihood programmes (p330)
- Spot dolphins from boats once used by manta ray- and whale-fishermen near Pamilian Island (p331)
- Go 'WWOOFing' as a willing worker on an organic farm in the Cordillera mountain towns of Acop (p161) and Asipulo (p176)
- For responsible bird and primate viewing, drop into the Philippine Eagle Research & Nature Center (p386) near Davao, or Bohol's Tarsier Research & Development Center (p333)

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Playing with Water – Passion and Solitude on a Philippine Island is James Hamilton-Paterson's simply brilliant account of the time he spent on an islet near Marinduque. In addition to containing excellent descriptions of the underwater world, Hamilton-Paterson's book sheds light on virtually all aspects of Philippine culture – barangay (villages) politics, dynamite fishing, child prostitution, rural superstitions, you name it. This book should whet your appetite for a spell on one of the Philippine's many Robinson Crusoe islands.

Invented Eden: the Elusive, Disputed History of the Tasaday, by Robin Hemley, analyses the so-called Tasaday controversy. In 1972 *National Geographic* did a feature on a Stone Age tribe discovered in Mindanao. Later it was discovered that the 'Tasaday' were T'boli tribespeople in on a hoax. Or were they? Recent evidence suggests the hoax claim was the real hoax! In shedding light on the controversy, Hemley reveals much about Filipino culture, society and (recent) history.

Eye of the Fish is an interesting collection of essays by Manila-born, New York-raised journalist Luis H Fracia. The book mixes accounts of his youth in the Philippines and subsequent trips back to the country as an adult, and is an interesting meditation on the Filipino identity. This book is a good introduction to the various issues facing the Philippines and its people today.

INTERNET RESOURCES

ClickTheCity.Com (www.clickthecity.com) A great site for happenings in Manila and around the country, with a decent travel section.

Lonely Planet (www.lonelyplanet.com) The Lonely Planet site has lots of information on hotels and travel in the Philippines, and on travel in general.

Philippine Daily Inquirer (www.inquirer.net) The best Philippines online news site.

PinoyPress (www.pinoypress.com) Hard-hitting webzine with insightful analysis of the Mindanao conflict and other key national issues.

Tanikalang Ginto (www.filipinolinks.com) Offers useful links to nearly every topic under the Philippine sun.

Visit Philippines (www.visitphilippines.org) Has all sorts of practical information and links to a dizzying array of Philippines-related sites.

WOW Philippines (www.wowphilippines.com.ph) The site of the Philippines Department of Tourism (DOT) has useful general info about travelling in the Philippines.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

MANILA PLUS ONE

One to Two Weeks

Many visitors to the Philippines use Manila as a jumping-off point to more popular tourist spots, but the capital offers plenty to keep you occupied for a day or two. If you have a week to spend in the country, start off with two days in **Manila** (p73) doing a one-day tour of historic sights, such as **Intramuros** (p79), and another day for modern Manila as embodied by **Makati City** (p88) and other centres of contemporary urban development.

Having experienced a little of Philippine life in the big city, you'll be ready to hit the countryside. Beach lovers should fly straight to **Boracay** (p285) with its unmatched white beach, and plenty of activities and nightlife to keep you entertained. For a more mellow beach experience, fly to **Dumaguete** (p310) and find a secluded spot in southern Negros or **Siquijor** (p317).

Divers can head to **Puerto Galera** (p214), where you'll find plenty of dive buddies, and fish, along with some mischievous nightlife. Prefer mountains? Go north to 'the eighth wonder of the world': the ancient rice terraces of **Banaue** (p171). If you've got time while in the Cordillera, tack on a trip to nearby **Sagada** (p163) or explore more rice terraces around **Bontoc** (p167) before heading back via the Philippines' 'summer capital', **Baguio** (p154).



Check out the capital for a few days, then head to an easily accessible destination like Boracay (30-minute flight from Manila) or Puerto Galera (3½ hours from Manila by bus and bangka). This route takes about a week – longer if you add the Cordillera (600km round trip from Manila).

NORTH–SOUTH TRAVERSE

One to Two Months

Manila (p73) is the obvious place to start. After a couple of days exploring the capital, head north to the mountainous **Cordillera region** (p152), stopping in **Banaue** (p171) to see the famous rice terraces, and laidback **Sagada** (p163) to enjoy the cool mountain air. From North Luzon, head back through Manila and continue south by bus to Southeast Luzon's Bicol region. This is the Philippines' adventure capital, with surfing, wakeboarding, volcano climbing and, of course, diving on offer. Around Legaspi you can experience the whale sharks off **Donsol** (p200) or climb part of the way up **Mt Mayon** (p198).

Proceeding south, cross the San Bernadino Strait to the rugged eastern Visayan islands of Samar and Leyte. Stop off in Imelda Marcos' hometown, **Tacloban** (p339), for some great food and a dose of WWII history at nearby **Red Beach** (p342). Use Tacloban as a base to explore **Sohoton Caves & Natural Bridge National Park** (p342) before catching a boat to the Visayas' gritty capital, **Cebu City** (p230) for some modern comforts. Board a ferry to **Bohol** (p322), with its famous tree-dwelling **tarsiers** (p333) and **Chocolate Hills** (p332), plus the diving wonderlands of **Panglao Island** (p327).

Adventurous travellers will want to make their way to **Ubay** (p336), near Anda, and return by ferry to Southern Leyte, where ferries head south to **Mindanao** (p358). In addition to prime off-the-beaten-track travelling, Mindanao features legendary surfing in **Siargao** (p377) and superb diving, island hopping and outdoor activities on **Camiguin Island** (p368). If you don't want to visit Mindanao, you could head from Bohol to **Negros** (p297), then follow the beautiful rugged coastlines of Negros and neighbouring Panay north all the way to **Boracay** (p285) for a few days of well-deserved tropical indulgence on the Philippines' hippest, most happening island.

If you've got time and want to see a lot of the Philippines, start at the northern tip of Luzon and travel down to Mindanao, with the option of skipping Mindanao and exploring the western Visayas. You'll cover between 2000km and 3000km; the route takes from one to two months.



ROADS LESS TRAVELLED

WATER WORLD: PALAWAN

Two to Four Weeks

Sea sickness be damned – a trip up the coast of **Palawan** (p398) is a mini highlight reel of the best the Philippines has to offer. **Puerto Princesa** (p401), the capital and transport hub of this long slender island is the most convenient place to begin. Take a few days stay to check out the city's diverse restaurant scene and take a motorcycle ride through the surrounding countryside. To get a taste for Palawan's aquatic delights, head out on an island-hopping day trip to **Honda Bay** (p408). From Puerto, as the locals call it, organise a ride to **Sabang**, a laid-back beachfront village and the base for trips to the **Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park** (p409). The boat ride through this darkened riverine cave is a Jules Verne-like journey into the centre of the earth.

From Sabang, board a *bangka* for **Port Barton** (p412), another low-key town spread out along a beach with good snorkelling and isolated coves just a short ride offshore. Continue north along the watery highway, this time for **El Nido** (p416), a cramped town sandwiched between limestone cliffs and the fantastically picturesque **Bacuit Archipelago** (p420). You could spend weeks exploring these islands and their secret lagoons, beaches and rocky landscapes. From El Nido, take a boat that winds its way through a maze of islands up to **Coron Town** on **Busuanga Island** (p423). From this base you can venture out to the striking lakes of **Coron Island** (p427), and take in WWII history underwater while experiencing some of the best **wreck diving** (p423) in the world. From Busuanga, flights and ferries are available to usher you back to reality and Manila.



From Puerto Princesa to Busuanga Island, take in Palawan's most stunning features: the Subterranean River, the Bacuit Archipelago; and the wrecks, islands and lakes of Coron. The route covers approximately 500km, not including the journey to and from Manila.

DOING TIME ISLAND STYLE

One Month

An island-hopping tour of the Visayas is the perfect way to spend a month in the Philippines, particularly if you're a diver or beach-lover. Fly into **Cebu City** (p230), 'Manila Minor', but don't linger too long. Take the first convenient bus north to decompress at relaxed **Malapascua Island** (p253), or even slower-paced **Bantayan Island** (p251). Next, travel the length of Cebu by bus to **Lilo-an** (p257) which has some great diving off the southern tip of Cebu; especially keen divers might stop off in more happening **Moalboal** (p258) on the way.

From Lilo-an, boats take you over to Negros, the Visayas' most diverse island with a little something for everyone. First stop should be **Dumaguete** (p310), with its sophisticated nightlife, lively music scene and easy access to **Apo Island Marine Reserve** (p317). Hop on a fastcraft and spend a few days on delightful **Siquijor** (p317), home of Filipino witchcraft and the country's best-value accommodation. Then return to Dumaguete and take a bus around the southern tip of Negros to the remote beach retreats of **Sipalay** (p308).

From Sipalay, it's four hours by bus to Pulpupandan, from where the boat departs for **Guimaras** (p280), a gem of an island for lovers of postcard-perfect low-key resorts, as well as for mountain bikers and mango connoisseurs. Next, travel by boat to **Iloilo City** (p275). Check out Iloilo's impressive colonial architecture, then set your sights on the Philippines' most happening island, **Boracay** (p285). Before long you may be inspired to seek permanent-resident status, but if you find the beach-bum lifestyle too taxing take a vacation from your vacation by catching a ferry north to the island of Looc and then to either of the island retreats of **Romblon** (p269) or **Sibuyan** (p271) before returning to civilisation via Cebu or Manila.

Cut a swathe through the Visayas, enjoying the laid-back islands of Malapascua and Bantayan, some diving around Moalboal and Dumaguete, and the remote beaches of Sipalay and Siquijor. Sample Dumaguete's nightlife and Iloilo's architecture, then celebrate the completion of your loop on Boracay.



TAILORED TRIPS

NORTH LUZON TREKKER'S TREAT

From Baguio, take a bus to **Kabayan** (p161). Spend the night there and set out early the next morning for the Akiki Trail, which leads up to the grassy summit of Luzon's highest peak, **Mt Pulag** (p163). Fast hikers will be back in Kabayan the following evening. Hike out of Kabayan to the Halsema Hwy viewing the mummies at the **Timbac Caves** (p162) on the way, and jump on a northbound bus to Sagada, which is loaded with excellent **day hikes** (p164) and **caving** (p163). The amazing amphitheatre-like rice terraces of **Maligcong** (p168) are your next destination. Either take a jeepney to **Bontoc** (p167) and explore these on a day trip, or walk there via **Mainit** (p168) from the town of Aguid near Sagada.

From Bontoc you have two choices. To get really off the beaten track, head up to **Tinglayan** (p169) and trek to the tribal villages around there; you might even meet the last of the Kalinga headhunters. From Tinglayan, travel by jeepney or white-water raft down the Chico River to **Tabuk** (p170). Alternatively, from Bontoc head straight to **Banaue** (p170) and **Batad** (p174), site of Luzon's most famous **rice terraces** (p171). Hard-core trekkers should not miss the outstanding two-day trek to Batad from **Barlig** (p169), outside of Bontoc, via Mt Amuyao (2702m). The stunning hikes around Batad and Banaue will keep you occupied for days.



DIVER'S ODYSSEY

Starting in Manila, you could warm up with a few easy dives around **Anilao** (p211), or head straight south for the world-class diving around **Puerto Galera** (p214) on Mindoro. If you don't already have it, you could get your diving certification here. From Mindoro, head south to the Visayas. **Cebu City** (p238) is a good place to begin your exploration of the Visayas. Nearby **Moalboal** (p258) has some great shore diving and the rich Pescador Island.

Moving over to nearby Bohol, **Alona Beach** (p327) puts you in easy reach of the incredible reef diving around **Balicasag Island** (p331). From Bohol you have two choices. You could head west to **Dumaguete** (p310) on Negros, jumping off point for **Apo Island** (p317), with its exquisite macro life and healthy coral, and **Siquijor** (p317), known for its great night diving. Alternatively, take a ferry to Southern Leyte and enjoy the great diving in Sogod Bay out of **Padre Burgos** (p346), where you may spot whale sharks.

Other Visayan options include **Malapascua Island** (p253) with its thresher sharks, and the seldom visited **Camotes Islands** (p261). Finally, if you have the time, a trip over to **Coron** (p423) on Palawan is a must. Divers worth their salt already know about Coron's legendary **wreck diving** (p423).



The Authors



GREG BLOOM

Coordinating Author, Activities in the Philippines, The Culture, Around Manila, North Luzon

Greg lived in Manila for almost five years before moving to Phnom Penh with his wife and daughter upon completion of this book. Travelling the Philippines in the service of Lonely Planet, Greg has fallen off a moving tricycle, flown out the back of a jeepney, and survived a bus crash on the back roads of Bicol. But mostly it's been good. When not writing about his former country of residence and favourite travel destination, Greg might be found snouting around the former Soviet Union (he once called Kyiv home) or running around Asia's Ultimate Frisbee fields. His blogs about this and other research trips are at www.mytripjournal.com/bloomblogs.



MICHAEL GROSBURG

Mindanao & Sulu, Palawan

Michael was raised in the Washington DC area, studied philosophy in Michigan and Israel, and first became familiar with Filipino culture while working on a small island in the Northern Mariana Islands. Because his co-workers were from all over the Philippines, he quickly learned to distinguish regional differences and dialects. After journalism work, graduate school, teaching and many long trips in Asia, including the Philippines, he realised that his island life was basically Filipino life writ small. In addition to hopperscotching the country on a long magazine research trip, this is the third edition of the Lonely Planet *Philippines* guidebook he's worked on.



VIRGINIA JEALOUS

Southeast Luzon, Mindoro, The Visayas (Panay, Boracay, Masbate, Samar, Leyte & Biliran Island)

Virginia has been visiting the Philippines since 1984, and over the years she's worn various travel hats. During her first tourist trip Marcos was president, and she remembers road-blocks and being searched at gunpoint. Several years and a president or two later, she worked with local NGOs on small-scale tourism projects establishing homestays and training tour guides. In 1999 she returned and managed to combine the two experiences when writing Lonely Planet's *Philippines*. Almost 10 years later, travelling for this edition, she was delighted to catch up with old friends and to make some new, and to discover that however much has changed, the tradition of hospitality hasn't.

LONELY PLANET AUTHORS

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**PIERS KELLY****The Visayas (Cebu, Camotes, Negros, Siquijor, Bohol, Iloilo City, Guimaras & Romblon)**

After three years as a guidebook and phrasebook editor at Lonely Planet's Melbourne office, Piers made his first foray into the Visayas as a linguist with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples in Bohol. The experience brought him face-to-face with the extraordinary diversity of the Visayas, where age-old allegiances of family, provenance and tribe are as resilient as ever. Now in the early stages of a PhD on the history of the Eskayan auxiliary language of Bohol, Piers inhabits a dusty patch of northwest Australia where he supplements his pocket money with freelance writing and social work.

CONTRIBUTING AUTHOR

Dan Eldridge Greg Bloom updated the Manila and Around Manila chapters based on an original submission by Dan Eldridge.

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