

Philippines

The **Philippines** (Filipino: *Pilipinas*), officially the **Republic of the Philippines** (*Republika ng Pilipinas*), is an archipelago of more than 7,100 islands in [Southeast Asia](#).

The country has one of the world's longest coastlines with many fine beaches and excellent [diving](#). There is great cultural diversity due to the many islands, many waves of immigration, and a mixture of foreign influences — the country has been trading with nearby nations for several thousand years and was a Spanish colony from the late 1500s to 1898, then American until 1946. It would take decades to visit and experience everything.

Many locals speak English well and most of the others have at least some English. Food and accommodations are cheap, many destinations have excellent infrastructure, and the people are cheerful and friendly; perhaps the easiest way to recognize a Filipino abroad is to see who has the broadest smile.

Regions

Wikivoyage divides the country into four island groupings:

Luzon ([Metro Manila](#), [Cordillera Administrative Region](#), [Ilocos Region](#), [Cagayan Valley](#), [Central Luzon](#), [Calabarzon](#), [Bicol](#), and the outlying island/archipelagic provinces of [Batanes](#), [Mindoro](#), [Marinduque](#) and [Romblon](#)) is an administrative region centered on the largest and most populous island in the Philippines. Located in the northern region of the archipelago, it is the economic and political center of the nation, being home to the capital city, Manila, and to Quezon City, its most populous city.

Visayas ([Leyte](#), [Samar](#), [Cebu Province](#), [Bohol](#), [Negros](#), [Panay](#), and the small island provinces [Biliran](#), [Siquijor](#) and [Guimaras](#)) is one of the three principal geographical divisions of the Philippines, located between the other two (Luzon and Mindanao). It consists of many islands and has its own ethnic groups and [languages](#), closely related to other Filipino groups and languages.



Regions of the Philippines



Mindanao ([Zamboanga Peninsula](#), [Northern Mindanao](#), [Davao Region](#), [Soccsksargen](#), [Caraga Region](#), [Bangsamoro](#))

is the second largest island in the Philippines. This area has many of the country's Muslims, some are quite radical, and **much of the area is considered unsafe** for travel; see warnings in [Mindanao](#) and lower-level articles for details.

Palawan ([Palawan Island](#), [Calamian Islands](#), [Cuyo Islands](#))

is an archipelagic province to the west of the rest of the country. It is the largest province in the country by area. Its capital is the city of [Puerto Princesa](#).


The Philippine government's administrative system uses three top-level regions: Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao. They treat Palawan as part of the [Mimaropa](#) region, administered under Luzon. Below that are 18 lower-level regions, 80 provinces, 120 cities and many rural municipalities.

Cities

With a population of 109 million as of the 2020 census, the Philippines has many cities. Listed below are some of the most important cities for visitors.

- **1 Metro Manila** - the National Capital Region is one of the largest cities in the world and a place of huge contrasts, from ultra-modern buildings and affluent districts to slums plagued with garbage and crime; its pollution, traffic jams, and the scarcity of historical sights may discourage visitors, but the smiling, stoical and resourceful people, and the staggering variety of culture and entertainment, are its saving grace.
- **2 Bacolod** - known as the "City of Smiles" because of the MassKara Festival (Máscara in Spanish) held annually on 19 October, it is one of the gateways to [Negros Island](#) and the home of the famous Bacolod Chicken Inasal.
- **3 Baguio** - Luzon's summer capital because of its cool weather, it boasts well-maintained parks and scenic areas, and is the home of the "Igorot", the indigenous peoples of the Cordilleras.
- **4 Cagayan de Oro** - known as the "City of Golden Friendship", it is popular for white water rafting and is the gateway to Northern Mindanao.
- **5 Cebu City** - the "Queen City of the South" was the first Spanish base in the Philippines and is a major center for commerce, industry, culture and tourism; [Metro Cebu](#) is the country's second largest urban area, after Metro Manila.
- **6 Davao** - the largest city in the Philippines in terms of land area, is known for its Durian fruit and for being the home of Mount Apo, the Philippines' tallest mountain.
- **7 Tagbilaran** - capital of [Bohol](#), a major tourist area.
- **8 Vigan** - the capital of [Ilocos Sur](#) and a UNESCO World Heritage Site; its city center is the finest example of Spanish colonial architecture in the Philippines with well-preserved, cobbled streets.
- **9 Zamboanga** - known as "La Ciudad Latina de Asia" (Asia's Latin City), it is the melting pot between the Philippines' Christian and Muslim cultures, boasting old mosques, grand churches and historic colonial structures.

Other destinations

- **1 Banaue** has 2,000-year-old rice terraces and called by Filipinos the *eighth wonder of the world*, it is a  UNESCO World Heritage Site. People are fascinated at the immense work of the *Igorots* (mountain tribes of northern Luzon) in making this.

- **2 Boracay** is a 10-km-long island featuring white sands, one of the country's best-known resort areas.
- **3 Donsol** is the *Whale Shark Capital* of the world, dive and see whale sharks.
- **4 El Nido** has dozens of limestone islands that form a stunningly beautiful karst topography permeated by crystal-clear bays and lagoons, still relatively unspoiled by mass tourism
- **5 Malapascua** Island features a beautiful white sand shoreline and coral gardens.
- **6 Mayon Volcano**, an active volcano which local tourist literature claims has the world's most perfect stratovolcano cone.
- **7 Panglao Island** in Bohol Province, a resort island with fine beaches. The rest of the province has other attractions including the Chocolate Hills and wild tarsiers (tiny primates).
- **8 Puerto Galera** on Mindoro, a diving destination, and also a favorite getaway for Filipinos during Holy Week because of its white sand shorelines and its amazing flora.
- **9 Taal Volcano** is an active volcano with a lake in its caldera, located in another lake that is the caldera of a larger dormant volcano. It is quite scenic, and close enough to Manila to be popular as a weekend trip.



El Nido, Palawan.



Mayon Volcano, Albay.

See also: UNESCO World Heritage List#Philippines.

Understand

With over 7,100 islands and 300,000 km² (120,000 sq mi) of territory between the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea (called the "West Philippine Sea" in the Philippines), the Philippines is the second largest archipelago, after nearby Indonesia. The islands are mostly volcanic in origin, covered with tropical rainforest and fertile soil, but much of the rainforest has been cut down. The terrain varies considerably, but many of the coasts have a lot of bays and headlands, and many of the larger islands have mountainous interiors. The coasts also have many coral reefs.

The climate is tropical, with constantly high humidity and high, stable temperatures, so prepare to change clothes frequently under the sweltering heat. Mountainous areas are the exception to the norm, rather temperate with mildly cool temperatures during the cool dry season from November to March. Frost forms on mountainous areas during the cool months, but there is no snowfall, as temperatures never drop below freezing and peaks do not rise above 4,000 m (13,000 ft).

| PHILIPPINES | |
|---------------------|---|
| | |
| Capital | Manila |
| Currency | Philippine peso (PHP) |
| Population | 109 million (2020) |
| Electricity | 220 volt / 60 hertz (NEMA 1-15, NEMA 5-15, Europlug) |
| Country code | +63 |
| Time zone | Philippine Standard Time, Asia/Manila |
| Emergencies | 911 |
| Driving side | right |

The country has problems like crime, corruption, poverty, and internal conflicts. There is ongoing conflict between the

[edit on Wikidata](#)

Philippine government and Islamic separatists in Mindanao, and with Communist rebels (New People's Army) elsewhere. Spillovers of hostilities into large cities have occurred. The red tape, bribery, and excessive patronage associated with Philippines' bureaucracy has been reduced, but some locals still distrust government. Crimes and illegal drugs are commonplace, but you are more likely to encounter them if you venture into rough areas. Western nations have discouraged travel to the country because of safety and security concerns.

Despite the first impressions of the Philippines as relatively economically developed, it remains a developing country struggling with income inequality and poverty. Most Filipinos struggle to live with as little as ~~₱400-600~~ (about US\$8-12 as of 2019) a day, whether it be a farmer or a salesperson or fast food crew. The *sosyal* (socialites) and *nouveaux riches*, on the other hand, will be seen cruising in their luxury cars, owning guarded mansions, and sending their children to prestigious private schools. Some people without work resort to informal work or committing crime to earn a living. The capital, Metro Manila, is suffering from its notorious traffic jams, and slums can be found in many places, sometimes in stark contrast to skyscrapers in its business districts like Makati. Economic and political centralization, often called "Imperial Manila" by critics, remains the cause of the economic plight in many provinces and increased calls for regional self-determination. As with the rest of Southeast Asia, the Philippines is also blighted with uncontrolled development causing urban sprawl, lack of pedestrian- and wheelchair-friendly facilities in many locations, and uncollected garbage.

Barangays

The lowest administrative level in the Philippine system is the **barangay**, a rural district or an urban neighborhood. Each has a barangay captain, and many have an elected council and/or their own neighbourhood security force called *tanod*. Nearly all have a barangay hall, often with other facilities like a health clinic, daycare centres or recreation center either in the same building or nearby. Barangays may have basketball courts, some variation of a jeepney stop or kiss & ride and a public/satellite market (that usually runs occasionally).

Addresses or directions in the Philippines usually include the barangay name. Be sure to know it if you will have to direct a taxi or tricycle driver.

Barangay offices issue a variety of permits: criminal record checks, government issued identification, and so on. Filipinos need a *barangay clearance* form, which serves as a character and neighbourhood reference, as a foundation document for job applications. Barangays also administer programs like free flu shots for seniors (foreigners included), though COVID shots are more often arranged by city or regional governments.

Anyone taking up long-term residence in the Philippines would be well advised to at least visit their barangay office and introduce themselves so that they will be recognized when they need a permit, a flu shot, a waste collection complaint or whatever.

The word *barangay* may have come from *balangay* — the type of boat that Austronesian settlers arrived on — or from Spanish *barrio*, which it replaced as the official term in the 1970s. It is now the standard word in Philippine English, in Tagalog, and in many of the country's other languages.

History

The first major wave of settlers in the Pacific crossed shallow seas and land bridges from mainland Asia starting around 70,000 BCE, and the oldest site so far found in the Philippines is Tabon Man on Palawan, about 45,000 BCE. These were Melanesians, ancestors of some Filipinos, most Papuans, and all Aboriginal Australians. Direct descendants of these people, the *Negritos* or *Aetas*, can still be found in Negros Oriental, northern Luzon, and other areas. Today they mostly live in the mountains, having been driven out of the prime coastal areas by later immigrants.

A few thousand years BCE, they were followed by Austronesian settlers traveling the same route but this time over sea in their impressive *balangay* boats. This word is where the name of the Filipino political institution the barangay came from. The Austronesian ethnolinguistic group includes Malays, Indonesians and Polynesians, and is spread as far as Hawaii, Easter Island, New Zealand and Madagascar. Its origins are a matter of scholarly controversy. One widely held theory has them coming from Taiwan, and traveling south to the Philippines. Other theories put their origins in southern China, in mainland Southeast Asia or in mainland China's Liangzhu Culture.


A large majority of Filipinos today are of Austronesian descent and linguists classify all the Filipino languages as members of the Austronesian family. However, having been a trading nation for thousands of years, a colony for several hundred, and a destination for tourists and retirees for decades, the country includes descendants of many other ethnic groups. The largest non-indigenous minority group are the Chinese, mainly Hokkien speakers whose family origins are in southern Fujian province, and Manila's Chinatown is the oldest one in the world. The Philippines has many religions, most introduced by various traders or invaders; the most important are Catholic Christianity and Sunni Islam.

Under Spanish rule

See also: Magellan-Elcano circumnavigation, Spanish Empire

When the explorer **Ferdinand Magellan** set foot on the island of Homonhon in 1521, he was the first European to reach the archipelago. His crew were treated to a feast by the welcoming islanders who wore elaborate tattoos. Magellan was Portuguese, but it was a Spanish expedition which he led to the islands. Lapu-Lapu, a native chief of Mactan Island, fought a battle with Magellan; the natives won and Magellan was killed.



Magellan's Cross in Cebu City 

In 1565 an expedition under Miguel López de Legazpi arrived to claim the country as a Spanish colony. The colony was named for Crown Prince Philip II of Spain and most of the natives converted to Catholicism. Some Muslims in the south and various animistic mountain tribes, however, resisted Spanish conquest and Catholic conversion.

In the period of Spanish rule galleons brought large amounts of silver from Acapulco to Manila, and this had a large effect on trade across much of Asia. The Manila galleons made contact with Mexico and the rest of the Americas. Mayans and Aztecs settled in the Philippines and introduced their cultures which were embraced by the Filipinos. The Philippines were heavily influenced by Mexico and Spain and the archipelago became Hispanized. Filipinos and other Asians used the Manila galleons to migrate to the West.

The longest revolt against Spanish colonization was led by Francisco Dagohoy in Bohol and this lasted for 85 years covering the period of 1744-1829. There were several other revolts; see Philippine Revolution for one and Mindanao#Understand for resistance by Muslims in the south. During Spanish rule, European powers such as the Dutch, Portuguese and British also tried to colonize the country; none succeeded.

The Philippines remained a Spanish colony for over 300 years until 1899 when it was ceded by Spain to the United States following the Spanish-American War.

American and Japanese occupation

The Filipinos declared independence in 1898 and resisted the American occupation for seven long, brutal years until surrender completed the occupation of the Philippines.

The war was quite controversial in the U.S., and famous writers weighed in on both sides. Rudyard Kipling, an Englishman born in India and very much in favour of Empire, urged America to "Take up the White Man's Burden" (http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/poems_burden.htm) while Mark Twain wrote "the United States paid poor decrepit old Spain \$20,000,000 for the Philippines. It was just a case of this country buying its way into good society ... like an American heiress buying a Duke or an Earl. Sounds well, but that's all." (<http://www.twainquotes.com/Philippines.html>)

The American presence remained until World War II when Japan invaded the Philippines. The retreating American General Douglas MacArthur famously promised "I shall return", and did so later in the war. There is a monument on Leyte Island where he landed and various other wartime ruins or monuments around the country; Coron is famous for wreck diving because the U.S. Navy sank a number of Japanese ships there in 1944.

On 4 July 1946, the Philippines was granted independence by the U.S., becoming the first country in Asia to gain independence from a colonial power. The U.S. continued to maintain a significant military presence until the early 1990s, especially in the Subic Naval Base in Zambales and Clark Air Base in Angeles City. Both were quite important during the Vietnam War.

Post-independence era

Until the 1960s, the Philippines was widely considered to be the second most developed country in Asia after Japan. Several decades of misrule by the corrupt dictator **Ferdinand Marcos** then plunged the country into deep debt. Poverty became widespread and infrastructure for development was severely lacking. In 1986, the People Power uprising overthrew the Marcos government during so-called the EDSA Revolution. He was replaced by **Corazon Aquino**, widow of murdered opposition leader, Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr.

In the late 20th century, corruption was one of the main problems of the country. The country suffered slightly in the 1997 Asian financial crisis; that led to a second EDSA revolt which overthrew President Joseph Estrada; the vice-president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (daughter of one of the former presidents), took his place. After her term ended in 2010, Benigno Aquino III (nicknamed "Noy" and "Pnoy"), son of Corason and Benigno Aquino, Jr., was elected president.

In mid-2016, a new president was elected, **Rodrigo Duterte**. He had been mayor of Davao, and earned the nickname "the punisher" by cleaning up the gang warfare that plagued that city in the 1990s. Critics claim he did that largely by encouraging police and vigilantes to execute gang members without trial. In the presidential campaign, he vowed to clean up corruption and the drug trade (especially *shabu*, or crystal methamphetamine, which is a serious problem in the country) and critics now accuse him of using similar tactics nationwide. Western media sources put the death toll around 1,000 a month since he became president, though the numbers are neither precise nor undisputed. On September 30, 2016, Duterte stated that he would like to emulate Hitler's Holocaust by exterminating 3 million drug users and dealers in the country, so it is safe to assume the killings will continue as long as he is in office. Despite much condemnation from the West, Duterte remains popular among Filipinos, many of whom are weary of having to deal with drug dealers and violent crime on a daily basis, and appreciate Duterte's efforts to deal with those problems. Moreover, Duterte has also invested substantially in improving infrastructure, leading to an improvement in the standard of living of many regular Filipinos. Duterte left office at the end of his term in 2022, and was succeeded by Bongbong Marcos, the son of former dictator Ferdinand Marcos, while Duterte's daughter Sara Duterte was elected vice president.

Things have been improving slowly on the economic front but the Philippines is still largely a poor country. According to the Philippines Statistical Authority, in 2018 16.6% of Filipinos had income not sufficient to meet their basic *food and non-food* needs. This would mean monthly income of less than ~~₱10,727~~ for a family of five. 5.2% of Filipinos had income that was not enough to meet just the basic *food* needs, e.g. monthly income for a family of five less than ~~₱7,528~~. These rates improved from 23.3% and 9.1% respectively since 2015. As a result, one of the major exports is labor: around 10% of Filipinos live abroad, either as immigrants or as contract workers, and remittances from those people account for over 10% of the nation's GDP.

People

The Philippines has population of approximately 109 million people in 2020, and is second most populous in Southeast Asia, behind Indonesia, and the eighth in Asia, ahead of Japan. The population is concentrated in regions like Metro Manila, Central Luzon, Calabarzon, and Cebu. Most of the population is along the coasts, and the mountain areas are more sparsely settled.

Filipinos are a multicultural people hailing from over 175 ethnic groups and tribes, mostly defined by language, and are mostly of Austronesian origin. In terms of religion, Filipinos are majority Christian, with significant Muslim and animist minorities.

Trading, colonization and globalization also brought immigrant populations that contributes to the Filipino melting pot; there is a significant number of Filipinos with Chinese, Arab, Hispanic, European, and American mixtures.



Luneta Park



The largest ethnic groups of the Philippines are the **Tagalogs** (24.4%), the **Visayans** (11.4%), the **Cebuanos** (9.9%), the **Ilocanos** (8.8%), the **Hiligaynon** or **Ilonggos** (8.4%), the **Bicolanos** (6.8%) and the **Waray** (4%). The remaining 26.3% of the population goes to the Muslim Filipino (Moro) ethnic groups, the Kapampangan, the Pangasinenses, the Ibanag, the Ivatan, and a hundred more ethnic groups, plus indigenous peoples and immigrants. Indigenous peoples like the Igorot of the Luzon Cordilleras, the Mangyan of Mindoro, the Lumad of Mindanao, and the various Negrito (*Aeta/Ati/Ita*) tribes scattered throughout the archipelago compose about 3% of the population.

Immigrants form about 1-2% percentage of the Philippine population, with the largest being the **Filipino Chinese** (~2 million). Most of the Chinese immigrants to the Philippines come from Fujian and Guangdong, though there have been Chinese migration been back in the precolonial and colonial eras. While retaining a distinct identity, most Filipino Chinese have assimilated into mainstream Filipino culture, intermarried with Filipinos, and became successful business owners, politicians and entertainers. Other major immigrant populations are Koreans, Japanese, Americans, Indians, British, Canadians, Spaniards, Germany, Jews and Arabs. They mostly live in the large cities to varying degrees of assimilation and are either entrepreneurs, students, retirees, immigrants or foreign spouses of Filipino citizens.

Culture

The Philippines has a diverse culture blending East and West; you will find a unique blend of local customs, Chinese traditions, Hispanic religiosity, machismo and romance, and Western ideals and popular culture. There is no single Filipino culture *per se*, but there are over a hundred ethnic and regional cultures; be prepared for wild variations in the local culture as you enter another region, island, or province.



MassKara Festival in Bacolod

Filipino traits are a confluence of many cultures. Filipinos are famous for the *bayanihan* or spirit of kinship and camaraderie taken from their Austronesian forefathers. They observe very close family ties. Roman Catholicism comes from the Spaniards who were responsible for spreading the Christian faith across the archipelago. The Spaniards introduced Christianity and succeeded in converting the overwhelming majority of Filipinos; at least 80% are Catholic today. The Philippines is one of only two countries in Asia with a majority Roman Catholic population (the other being East Timor).

The genuine and pure expression of hospitality is an inherent trait in Filipinos, especially those who reside in the countryside who may appear very shy at first, but have a generous spirit, as seen in their smiles. Hospitality, a trait displayed by every Filipino, makes these people legendary in Southeast Asia. Guests will often be treated like royalty in Philippine households. This is most evident during fiestas when even virtual strangers are welcomed and allowed to partake of the feast that most, if not all, households have for the occasion. At times, this hospitality is taken to a fault. Some households spend their entire savings on their fiesta offerings and sometimes even run into debt just to have lavish food on their table. They spend the next year paying for these debts and preparing for the next fiesta. At any rate, seldom can you find such hospitable people who enjoy the company of their visitors. Perhaps due to their long association with Spain, Filipinos are emotional and passionate about life in a way that seems more Latin than Asian.

It may seem peculiar for tourists to notice the Latin flair in Filipino culture. Mainstream Philippine culture compared to the rest of Asia is quite Hispanic and westernized on the surface. But still, Filipinos are essentially Austronesian and many indigenous and pre-Hispanic attitudes and ways of thinking are still noticeable underneath a seemingly westernized veneer.

Filipinos lead the bunch of English-proficient Asian people today and English is considered as a second language of the majority and the native language of a few. The American occupation was responsible for teaching the Filipino people the English language. Slightly less than half a million people still speak Spanish, while over a million are proficient in the Spanish-based creole Chavacano.

Politics

The government of the Philippines is largely based on the political system of the United States. The President of the Philippines is directly elected by the people, and serves as both head of state and head of government. The President is elected every six years, and can only serve one term. The President and Vice President are elected separately in the Philippines, so it is possible (and not uncommon) for the two office holders to come from opposing parties.

The political system follows a multi-party system. The national political arena is dominated by nine political parties, with the center-left, federalist PDP-Laban (Partido Demokratiko Pilipino – Lakas ng Bayan), the neoliberal Liberal Party, and the center-right United Nationalist Alliance (UNA) being the dominating ones since 2016. There are also minor parties in Congress and regional parties of less importance in the provinces. Most positions in the local government are also dominated by the major parties. That being said, political parties tend to be weak and dependent on familiar personalities and families; party switching is not uncommon and election winners tend to be dictated by name recognition rather than ideologies or platforms.

The legislature is a bicameral congress, which consists of a lower house known as the *Kapulungan ng mga Kinatawan* (House of Representatives), and an upper house known as the *Senado* (Senate). Both houses are elected directly by the people. The country is divided into constituencies for the election of the lower house, while the upper house is elected by the country as a whole based on proportional representation.

Politics is dominated by large, powerful families, where positions are passed from one family member to another, and political loyalties are often split along regional lines. Corruption remains rampant, especially through the *padrino* system, a form of spoils system. *Padrino* is often translated as "Godfather", and the system involves extensive patronage and nepotism. However, there have been efforts to eradicate the *padrino* system to make politics merit-based. Political demonstrations are widespread, as in most democracies, and political violence is also a concern, especially during election periods when rival families clash, sometimes even to the point of killing each other.

Religion

The Spanish made Catholicism almost ubiquitous, the Church is still very influential, and the Philippines has been Asia's largest predominantly Christian and Catholic country for centuries. However, there has also been a substantial Muslim population for centuries, Protestant missionaries have been active and several Protestant or other non-Catholic denominations are now well established in the country, and there are a few followers of other Asian religions as well.

The Philippines is not only the largest Christian country in Asia but also the world's third largest Roman Catholic nation. The Roman Catholic faith remains the single biggest legacy of three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule. Catholicism is still taken quite seriously in the Philippines. Masses draw crowds, from the biggest cathedrals in the metropolis to the smallest parish chapels in the countryside. During Holy Week, most broadcast TV stations close down or operate only on limited hours and those that do operate broadcast religious programs.

The Catholic Church also exerts quite a bit of influence even on non-religious affairs such as affairs of state. Mores are changing slowly, however; Filipinos are now slowly accepting what were previously taboo issues in so far as Roman Catholic doctrine is concerned, such as artificial birth control, premarital sex, and the dissolution of marriage vows.

The biggest religious minority are Muslim Filipinos (Moros) who primarily live in Mindanao but also increasingly in cities such as Manila, Baguio or Cebu in the north and central parts of the country. The Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) gives partial self-government to some of them. They account for around 5% of the population. Islam is the oldest continually practiced organized religion in the Philippines, with the first conversions made in the 12th century. Islam became such an important force that Manila at the time of the Spanish arrival in the 16th century was a Muslim city. Many aspects of this Islamic past are seen in certain cultural traits many mainstream Christian Filipinos still exhibit (such as eating and hygiene etiquette) and has added to the melting pot of Filipino culture.

Terrorist attacks and violent confrontations between the Philippine Army and splinter militant Islamic organizations such as the Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have strained relations between Muslim and the non-Muslim Filipinos in the southern rural parts of the country. However, the Muslim Filipinos are much more liberal in their interpretations of Islam, and like the Muslims of Indonesia, are generally more relaxed regarding such issues as gender segregation or the hijab (veil) than Muslims outside of Southeast Asia. Some Filipino or foreign resident Muslims were or have been converts, particularly those who found Islam to be appealing or Christianity to be unpalatable and insufficient, or even lost their faith in Christian doctrines. Conversely, fewer Christian Filipinos or foreign nationals especially of Filipino descent are converts from Islam or other non-Christianity.

Indian Filipinos, Chinese Filipinos and Japanese Filipinos, who collectively account for 3% of the population, are mostly Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Shinto and Taoist. These populations have been in the country for centuries preceding Spanish rule, and many aspects of Buddhist and Hindu belief and culture permeate in the mainstream culture of Christian or Muslim Filipinos as well.

As with many things in the Philippines, religion is not as clear-cut and defined as official statistics suggest, and many Christians and Muslims also practice and believe in indigenous spiritual aspects (such as honoring natural deities and ancestor worship, as well as the existence of magic and healers) that may



Vigan Cathedral



Paoay Church in Ilocos Norte



in some cases contradict the orthodox rules of their religions.

Climate

The climate is **tropical**, and average temperatures range from 25 °C (77 °F) to 32 °C (90 °F), and humidity averages around 77 percent. The Philippines is often described as only having two seasons, but in the northern part of the country, there are actually three:

- The **dry season** generally runs from November to May, and in parts of the country, especially about 12 degrees north of the equator, can be subdivided into a cool and a hot period:
 - The **cool dry season** runs from November to February, with mid-January to end of February the coolest times. Temperatures are cooler in the mountains, but even lowland areas can experience temperatures below 20 °C (68 °F) when the northeast monsoon (*amihan*) from Siberia is at full blast, so bring a sweater or light jacket at these times, especially when walking at night. This season is the best time to visit, with drier weather, but flights, boat and ferry trips, buses and accommodations tend to be expensive and difficult, especially during the Christmas and New Year season.
 - The **hot dry season** (summer, March to May) are the hottest months. The country becomes muggy, with temperatures soaring as high as 40 °C (104 °F), and heat indices of 50–60 °C (122–140 °F) not uncommon, especially in inland locations in Luzon like Cabanatuan and Tuguegarao. The temperatures are very desirable for going to the beaches, but is not good for sightseeing. Prices for flights, ferries, buses or accommodations skyrocket during this season, especially on Holy Week, and booking is difficult due to high demand.
- The **rainy season** starts in June or July and extends through October with strong typhoons possible. This also when the southwest monsoon (*habagat*) blows, which brings rain that characterizes this season.

Places about 12 degrees north of the equator generally have a more tropical climate, being truly dry and wet, with no month having an average low dropping below 20 °C (68 °F). Dry season generally runs from November to May; wet season from June to October. There are some possible exceptions, especially in the rainier eastern parts of the country (e.g. Bicol, Samar and Leyte islands), where the seasons are reversed: October to April are the rainiest and coolest, with May to September the driest.

Locations exposed directly to the Pacific Ocean have frequent rainfall all year. This includes the town of Pagsanjan south-east of Manila (though the famous falls around it will get you wet regardless). Baguio, branded as the summer capital of the Philippines, tends to be cooler due to its being located in mountainous regions with temperatures at night going below 20 °C (68 °F). During summer, the country experiences droughts, sometimes with extreme conditions, from about March to May.

Weather in the Philippines is changeable, and as anywhere in the tropics, it can be sunny, rainy, or cool within a few minutes. In the mountains or in Luzon, the mercury can suddenly drop below 20 °C (68 °F) during the cool months, and in the Cordilleras (including Baguio), it can frost (but it doesn't snow). When the rain pours or the cool *amihan* blows, you're at high risk for the flu. Have a raincoat, umbrella, or light jacket ready depending on the season!

Holidays

Christmas: The Filipino way

The Philippines is a multicultural country having Christian, Muslim and Buddhist holidays in addition to secular holidays. The year is welcomed by New Year's Day on 1 Jan. Being a predominantly Catholic country means observing the traditional Catholic holidays of **Maundy Thursday** (*Huwebes Santo*), **Good Friday** (*Biyernes Santo* or *Mahal na Araw*), and **Easter Sunday** (*Araw ng Pagkabuhay*) during Holy Week (*Semana Santa*). During **Araw ng Kagitingan** (Day of Valor), Boy Scouts re-enact the Bataan Death March every 2 years in honor of this day that is also known as **Bataan Day**; they march as long as 102 km (63 mi), and the Bataan Death March was part of the Battle of Bataan which was also part of the Battle of the Philippines. The Bataan Death March was a 102 km (63 mi) march and the people who participated in this march were captured, tortured and murdered. **All Saints Day** (*Undas*) is on 1 Nov and **All Souls Day** on 2 Nov. In recognition of the Muslim Filipino community, the Islamic feast of **Eid-Al-Fitr** (*Hari Raya Puasa*) held after the holy fasting month of Ramadan, is also a national holiday. This day changes year by year, as it follows the Islamic lunar calendar. **Chinese New Year** is also celebrated by the Chinese community but dates vary according to the Chinese lunar calendar. Secular holidays include **Labor Day** (1 May) and **Independence Day** (12 Jun). The last Monday of August is declared **National Heroes Day**. Some holidays also commemorate national heroes such as **Jose Rizal** (31 Dec) and **Andres Bonifacio** (30 Nov) as well as **Ninoy Aquino** (21 Aug). **Christmas** is ubiquitously celebrated on 25 Dec.

Major holiday seasons are **Holy Week** (*Semana Santa*, *Mahal na Araw* or Easter break), the three-day period including **All Saints' Day** (*Undas*, also a semestral vacation period for most schools) and **Christmas** and **New Year**. During these periods, the country takes a week off for locals to head home for the provinces. They are the times where Metro Manila and other metropolises have no traffic jams, yet the congestion moves to the provinces, with snarls stretching kilometers at expressways being not uncommon, and finding flights, buses or boats being near-to-impossible. Nevertheless, Holy Week and Christmas season are also peak season for beachgoing, and highland cities like Baguio and Tagaytay get the most visitors during those periods.

Dates

- **New Year's Day** (*Bagong Taon*): Jan 1



A Christmas Parol



Most Filipinos are devoutly Catholic; Christmas is celebrated from September till Epiphany. Go and have *Nochebuena* with a Filipino family; Filipinos don't mind strangers eating with them in their dining table as this is customary during *fiestas*. Try out *hamon* (Christmas ham) and *queso de bola* (Edam cheese). Caroling is widely practiced by many of the youth around the Philippines; they'll appreciate if you give them at least ₱5-10. Unless you're either non-practicing or a non-Catholic, don't miss the *Misa de Gallo* and the nine-day *Simbang Gabi* (Night Mass). This tradition was passed down from the Spaniards; the Masses are usually held either at midnight or before dawn. After these Masses, Filipinos eat *kakanin* (rice cakes) and *bibingka* (rice pancakes), sold outside churches, and drink *tsokolate* (hot chocolate), or eat *champorado* (rice porridge with hot chocolate). *Parols* (Star of Bethlehem lanterns) are hanged in front of houses, commercial establishments and streets. A Giant Lantern Festival is held in San Fernando, Pampanga. *Belens* or Nativity

- **Chinese New Year:** varies according to Chinese lunar calendar
- **Maundy Thursday** (*Huwebes Santo*): varies
- **Good Friday** (*Biyernes Santo*): varies
- **Easter Sunday** (*Araw ng Pagkabuhay*): varies
- ***Araw ng Kagitingan*** (Bataan Day, or Day of Valor): Apr 9
- **Labor Day** (*Araw ng mga Manggagawa, Mayo Uno*): May 1
- **Independence Day** (*Araw ng Kasarinlan*, commonly *Araw ng Kalayaan*): Jun 12
- **Ninoy Aquino Day:** August 21
- **National Heroes Day** (*Araw ng mga Bayani*): last Monday of August
- **All Saints Day** (*Undas, Todos los Santos, Araw ng mga Patay*): 1 Nov
- **Eid al-Fitr** (*Hari Raya Puasa*): varies according to Islamic lunar calendar
- **Eid al-Adha:** varies according to Islamic lunar calendar
- **Bonifacio Day:** Nov 30
- **Feast of the Immaculate Conception:** Dec 8
- **Christmas Eve:** Dec 24
- **Christmas Day** (*Pasko*): Dec 25
- **Rizal Day:** Dec 30
- **New Year's Eve:** Dec 31

scenes are displayed in city halls and/or commercial establishments. This is an experience one shouldn't miss if one is traveling in the Philippines. See [Christmas and New Year in the Philippines](#) for details.

Festivals

| Month | Festival | Place |
|-----------|------------------------------|---------------------|
| January | Ati-Atihan | Kalibo |
| | Sinulog | Cebu |
| | Dinagyang | Iloilo |
| February | Panagbenga | Baguio |
| | Kaamulan | Bukidnon |
| March | Paraw Regatta | Iloilo and Guimaras |
| | Pintados de Passi | Passi, Iloilo |
| | Araw ng Dabaw | Davao |
| April | Moriones | Marinduque |
| May | Magayon | Albay |
| | Pahiyas | Lucban |
| | Sanduguan | Calapan |
| June | Pintados-Kasadyaan & Sangyaw | Tacloban |
| July | T'nalak | Koronadal |
| August | Kadayawan | Davao City |
| September | Peñafrancia | Naga |

| | | |
|----------|--|-------------------|
| October | MassKara | Bacolod |
| November | Zamboanga Hermosa (Feast of Our Lady of the Pilar) | Zamboanga City |
| December | Binirayan | San Jose, Antique |
| | SumBingTik | Cainta, Rizal |

Time

The Philippines spans UTC time zone +8 (Philippine Standard Time or PST), which also covers Western Australia, central parts of Indonesia, Taiwan, all of China, Mongolia, and part of Russia (Siberia). As a tropical country, the Philippines does not observe daylight savings time.

The 12-hour clock is commonly used in both written and spoken form, while the 24-hour clock is more commonly used in some modes of transport and other specialist fields, e.g. ferry and flight schedules use the 24-hour clock.

Units of measure

The Philippines uses metric units in most cases since the Spanish colonial era, but US customary units (inches, feet, pounds) introduced during American colonization are also used in certain contexts, such as in quoting people's heights, and some precolonial units survive in common usage such as the *cavan* (*kuh-BAHN*), which equals to about 75 litres (16 imp gal; 20 US gal) and is used to quote the weight of a sack of rice.

Read

Filipino literature is a mix of Indian sagas, folk tales, and traces of Western influence. Classical books are written in Spanish as well as in Tagalog, but to this day most of Filipino literature is written in English. The Philippines, thus, is a multi-cultural country with its roots stretching from Asia to Europe and to the Americas.

History, documentary

- *Red Revolution* by Gregg R. Jones (*ISBN 0813306442*) - Documentary about the guerrilla movement; New People's Army (NPA), in the Philippines.
- *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* by Stanley Karnow (*ISBN 0345328167*) - Shares the story of European and American colonization in the archipelago as well as the restoration of democracy after the overthrow of Marcos.

Literature

- *Noli Me Tangere* by José Rizal - The best-known work of a hero of Philippine resistance against Spain
- *El Filibusterismo* by José Rizal
- *Dekada '70* by Lualhati Bautista (*ISBN 9711790238*) - A story about a middle class Filipino family that struggled to fight with other Filipinos during the martial law during the time of Marcos.

- *The Day the Dancers Came* by Bienvenido Santos
- *Amazing Archipelago* by John-Eric Taburada

Watch

The Filipino film industry is suffering because of its main rival, the Western film industry. In this 21st century only 40 films are produced each year; down from 200-300 films a year in the 1990s.

- **Cinemalaya Philippine Independent Festival**
- **Cinemanila International Film Festival**
- **Metro Manila Film Festival** — held annually during the Christmas season, showcasing local films released during the festival month.

Listen

Filipino music combines Asian, Western, Hispanic and indigenous influences, and is heavily influenced by Western pop music. Modern Filipino music is called original Pinoy music (OPM), an encompassing term regardless of the actual genre, and songs are usually written in Tagalog or English.

Traditional Filipino songs such as *kundiman* (nostalgic/poetic songs) are still held dearly by the population but are slowly losing influence among the younger generations.

Check out pop and rock groups such as The Eraserheads, Spongecola, Parokya ni Edgar, Gary Valenciano, Side A and Apo Hiking Society and Morissette Amon.

Pinoy Pop (PPop) is now increasing its popularity. That genre is inspired by Korean Pop or KPop. Check out the boy groups Alamat, SB19 and BGYO.

See also

Topics in the Philippines

[Bus travel in the Philippines](#)
[Christmas and New Year in the Philippines](#)
[Driving in the Philippines](#)
[Filipino cuisine](#)
[National parks and protected areas of the Philippines](#)
[Philippine Revolution](#)
[Shopping in the Philippines](#)

Tourist information

- [Philippines Tourism \(https://philippinetourism.co/\) website](https://philippinetourism.co/)

Talk

See also: [Tagalog phrasebook](#)

The Philippines has two official languages: **English** and **Filipino**. Both are used in education and most Filipinos speak at least some of both, though proficiency in either varies quite widely.

Filipino, the national language, is a standardized version of **Tagalog**, the language spoken around Metro Manila and much of southern and central Luzon. There are also dialects spoken in the southern Tagalog provinces, the most notable being the Batangas dialect with the catchy interjection *ala eh* and its vocabulary that continues to use words considered obsolete in most Tagalog dialects. While most Filipinos speak Tagalog for inter-ethnic communication, it can be seen as an inflammatory symbol of Tagalog "imperialism"; some Visayans still resent the elevation of Tagalog as the national language Filipino.

The Philippines has over 100 native languages, scattered throughout the country's regions and islands, though only a few regions and provinces have formally designated any of them as official or co-official (e.g. Ilocano is official in La Union). Similarly to the regional languages of Italy, they are sometimes imprecisely referred to as "dialects" of Tagalog/Filipino, and some others (e.g. Karay-a in Panay) are sometimes treated as dialects of another native language with more speakers. Some of the other major indigenous languages of the Philippines aside from Tagalog are:

- The **Visayan languages** (Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Waray and others) are spoken in the Visayas and most of Mindanao:
 - Cebuano (also called Bisaya) is spoken in Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, and much of Mindanao
 - Hiligaynon (Ilonggo) is spoken in Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Guimaras and the Soccsksargen region of Mindanao
 - Waray is spoken in the Samar and Leyte
 - Tausug is spoken in Sulu
 - Kinaray-a is spoken in Antique province
- Pangasinan is the primary and predominant language of the entire province of Pangasinan and northern Tarlac, on the northern part of Luzon's central plains geographic region, most of whom belong to the Pangasinan ethnic group.
- **Ilocano** (also called Iloco) is the most commonly spoken language in northern Luzon, including Ilocos Region, the Cordilleras and Cagayan Valley.
- **Ivatan** is spoken in Batanes province, a group of islands north of Luzon.
- **Bikol languages** (or Bicolano) are spoken in Bicol Region at the southeast tip of Luzon, and are known for wild variation between dialects; neighboring cities and towns may even have mutually unintelligible vocabularies.
- **Kapampangan**, which is more closely related to the indigenous languages of Zambales than to Tagalog, is spoken mainly in the provinces of Pampanga and southern Tarlac. Kapampangan sounds like a divergent Central Luzon Tagalog dialect, but it has a vocabulary, orthography and grammar that makes it a distinct language from Tagalog.
- **Sambal**, is spoken in some parts of Zambales province.

Most languages of the Philippines are part of the Austronesian languages, and are related to Malay, Indonesian, and most of the languages of the Pacific islands, and a speaker of any of them can recognize cognates. Many are heavily influenced by foreign languages like Spanish and English; most have loanwords from those, especially Spanish. Place names may follow Spanish spelling conventions (e.g. Tanjay, which is pronounced tan-HIGH), and many are written using the Latin alphabet.

English is an official language, and the primary language in education and government. It is mostly a second language for Filipinos. It is based on American English, but has acquired a distinctive Filipino flavor. There is no single Philippine English accent, and accents differ based on the native language of the speaker. Proficiency also varies, with educated urban Filipinos generally having higher proficiency. Knowledge of Tagalog or a regional language is useful when traveling outside the big cities and main tourist centers as English proficiency is limited there.

Below are some common characteristics of Philippine English:

- Pronunciation influenced by native languages, that may sometimes cause misunderstandings. There is usually an inability to pronounce some English sounds, such as F, V, Z, the schwa and TH, that *feet* and *pit* and *thin* and *tin* sound alike. Some words are stressed differently by Filipinos such as *Arabic* and *ceremony* usually due to Spanish influence. Visayans may interchange E and I and O and U. Some Philippine English accents may sound brash to native speakers.
- Use of cardinal numbers in dates (e.g. *June twelve* for Jun 12 instead of *June twelfth*). Ordinals are mostly used only in formal speeches.
- Influence of native language on grammar, especially on low-proficiency speakers. Nouns may be pluralized even if English does not have a plural (e.g. *furnitures* for *furniture*) and articles may be dropped depending on how something is said in one's mother tongue.
- Unique vocabulary or usages, which may not be used in other English varieties (e.g. *brownout* for a power outage, *rubber shoes* for sneakers). Philippine word usage mostly follows American usage, but in some cases, it closely aligns with British (such as football for American soccer, *course* for a program of study, and *cinema* for a movie theater).
- Code-switching between English and Tagalog or a regional language (as *Taglish* or *Bislish*) is rife even in formal settings, so are slang and colloquialisms (e.g. *nosebleed* for someone unable to understand someone's English, *number two* for a mistress, *warfreak* for a bellicose person) which generally do not occur outside informal publications. Nevertheless, Filipinos will usually try to standardize their English when talking to foreigners.

While radio, free-to-air TV and tabloids are mostly in Filipino, English is the predominant language in broadsheets and cable TV. English-language movies are generally released in theaters in the Philippines in original audio without subtitles, but may be dubbed into Filipino or a regional language when broadcast on free-to-air TV.

Spanish is no longer widely spoken, though many Spanish words survive in the local languages, and there are still up to about 400,000 people who speak the language to varying degrees of fluency. A Spanish-based creole, **Chavacano**, is spoken in Zamboanga City, Basilan (including Isabela City), and parts of coastal Cavite; Spanish speakers can understand it with some difficulty due to grammatical differences, archaisms, and Austronesian borrowings (especially in colloquial forms).

Other ethnic groups have brought new languages to the country, particularly in more urbanized areas like Manila. Ethnic Chinese brought along with them regional dialects like Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin; there is also a local variety of Hokkien called "Lan-nang" which is influenced by the Philippine languages and widely spoken in Manila's Chinatown, and Mandarin is also taught as an elective in schools. Korean and Japanese can be encountered in parts of large cities.

Filipino Sign Language (FSL) is the official sign language. It is mutually intelligible with American Sign Language but not with British Sign Language, Auslan or other sign languages.

Foreign films and television programs (including English-language ones) shown on free-to-air TV channels broadcasting in the local languages are usually dubbed into Tagalog ("Tagalized"), with subtitles provided for any dialogue not dubbed. Foreign serials and films shown exclusively on pay-TV channels are shown in their original language unless the channel is specifically designed for dubbed shows. Films shown in cinemas are shown with original audio, and only dialogue not in English or Tagalog is subtitled in English. Newer Tagalog films are being provided with English subtitles, however, since some are being released internationally.

Get in

As a mostly island nation separated by thousands of kilometers of seas, the Philippines is mostly reachable only by plane (even from within Southeast Asia), and while travel by sea is also available, they are limited to non-existent (and dangerous) and ports may have limited facilities for immigration and customs processing.

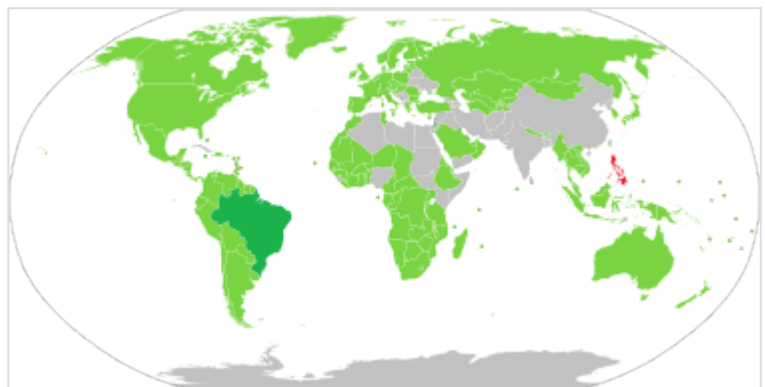
While Philippine bureaucracy is nowhere as cumbersome and corrupt since the end of the Marcos era, the catch is that most visitors can travel visa free or get a visa upon arrival at most ports of entry. Customs are relaxed, but the country is now strictly enforcing restrictions on bringing plants, animals, and food, and the obvious prohibitions on bringing in contraband.

Entry requirements

Visas

Nationals from most countries, including all ASEAN countries, can enter the Philippines without a visa for up to 30 days, or obtain a visa on arrival for up to 59 days, as long as they have a return or onward ticket as well as passports valid for a period of at least six months beyond the period of stay. Exceptions to this rule are as listed below:

- Nationals of Brazil and Israel may enter the Philippines visa-free for up to 59 days.
- Nationals of Hong Kong and Macau — including permanent residents of Macau who hold Portuguese passports — may enter the Philippines visa-free for up to 14 days.
- Nationals of the People's Republic of China traveling as tourists and holding a valid visa issued by Australia, Canada, Japan, the United States or a Schengen Area state may enter the Philippines visa-free for up to 7 days.
- Nationals of Taiwan holding passports with National ID numbers or Resident Certificate may apply for



A map showing the visa requirements of the Philippines, with countries in yellow, blue and orange having visa-free access

Summary of Philippine visa policy

Non-immigrant

- **9A:** Temporary visitor visa (for tourism, business, or medical care). Valid 30 days
- **9D:** Foreign business visa
- **9F:** Student visa

the eVisa. (<https://onlinetravel.meco.org.tw/EVISA/>)

- Nationals of India holding a valid tourist, business or resident visa issued by Australia, Canada, Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, the United States or a Schengen Area state may enter the Philippines visa-free for up to 14 days.

Citizens of all other countries not listed above need to apply for a visa at a Filipino diplomatic mission prior to departure.

Temporary visitor (9A) visas valid for 30 days are straightforward to obtain for most travelers. If intending to stay beyond 30 days, you may apply for a visa extension at the Bureau of Immigration (BI) which have offices in most main cities and at **Manila and Cebu airports**. Extensions are granted up to a maximum of six months per time. You can keep getting visa extensions up to a stay of 3 years, after which foreign nationals wishing to stay longer must go out of the Philippines and then come back to start anew.

The 1st visa extension got within the Philippines at a BOI office is from 30 days up to 59 days and cost ~~₱3130~~. The cost of a 29-day visa extension at Cebu airport is ~~₱3000~~. You could also get a 59-day tourist visa from any Philippine embassy around the world for ~~US\$30-40~~, but you must go to the embassy twice as the visa takes 2-3 working days to get.

If you overstay, you must pay on departure a fine of ~~₱1000~~ per month of overstay plus a ~~₱2020~~ processing fee.

Proof of yellow fever vaccination is required if you travel from a country where it is endemic.

Airlines may refuse to let you check in if you only have a one-way ticket to the Philippines due to immigration requirements. Cebu Pacific Air will require a printed copy of an onwards "itinerary receipt" at check in. If you want to risk not having an onwards ticket, try to check in early to allow yourself time to buy a ticket at an Internet cafe or ticket desk in the airport if the airline refuses to check you in.

If you intend to stay beyond the 3 years on a temporary visitor visa, consider applying for either a **temporary resident visa** (TRV), a **permanent resident visa** (PRV), or a **quota immigrant** (13) **visa**. This is possible if you are married to a Filipino citizen, and/or if your home country has an immigration reciprocity agreement (which if there is none, you must apply for a TRV).

Alien registration and the *Balikbayan* program

If you intend to stay in the Philippines beyond 59 days with anything other than a visa upon arrival or an extended temporary visitor visa, you must register for an **PhilSys** (<https://www.philsys.gov.ph>) national identity card online. This replaces the paper Alien Certificate of Registration (ACR) cards issues by the Bureau of Immigration in 2023. For foreign nationals, you must provide a valid ID card from your home country such as a driver's license or an equivalent national ID card. For retirees, you must also provide a copy of your retiree visa. Like the previous ACR, PhilSys IDs for foreign residents must be renewed every year.

- **9G**: Employment visa (along with Alien Employment Permit issued by the Department of Labor and Employment)
- **TRV**: Temporary resident visa
- **SEVUA**: Visa upon arrival. Valid 59 days.

Immigrant

- **13**: Quota immigrant visa
- **13A**: Espousal visa (for foreign spouses and unmarried children of Filipino citizens)
- **PRV**: Permanent resident visa

Special

- **SVEG**: Investor visa
- **SRRV**: Foreign retiree visa (issued by the Philippine Retirement Authority)

In addition, if you stay at any private residence (including apartments or condominium units), you must register your abode on the barangay of residence by obtaining a **Barangay Certificate of Residence** within 24 hours of your arrival, but this is not required for short-term travelers. You can use this in addition or in place of a foreign-issued ID if applying for a foreign resident ID card.

Under the "Balikbayan Program", former Filipino citizens who have been naturalized in a foreign country may enter the Philippines visa-free for up to one year. If eligible, you must prove your previous Philippine citizenship by presenting an old Philippine passport, birth certificate, or foreign naturalization documents. However, you may not have to present these documents to the immigration officer, as usually it is sufficient to speak any Filipino language, appear Filipino, and/or show the foreign passport if it indicates that you were born in the Philippines. If your Balikbayan status is granted, the immigration officer will annotate your passport for a one-year stay. Your spouse and children may also avail themselves of the Balikbayan privilege, as long as they enter and leave the Philippines together with you. If you choose to reside permanently, you can reacquire Filipino citizenship by taking the Philippine oath of allegiance, and your children (under 18), including illegitimate or adopted children, will automatically acquire Filipino citizenship.

Minors

There are additional requirements for minors who are traveling without both their parents. In many cases the parents will need to execute an affidavit of consent at their nearest Philippine consulate; bring copies of both the child's passport, accompanying adult's passport, and valid identification of the parents; and pay relevant fees. Please check with the Philippine embassy or consulate nearest you for more information.

Arrival and customs

The Philippines **fingerprints and photographs** visitors upon arrival and departure as part of the immigration process. These fingerprints may make their way into the databases of other countries' authorities. Those under 18 are exempted.

Before presenting yourself to border officials, you must fill out an eTravel form (<http://etravel.gov.ph>) out (also available via the eGovPH app) where you will provide your reason for travel, incoming flight, and your contact details (home/hotel address, phone numbers, emails), and travel history over the past 30 days. You also need to fill out the customs portion of the eTravel form. A QR code is generated upon completion; you are advised to save a screenshot of this.

Upon departure, you must fill up another eTravel form.

Customs are mostly relaxed with the general restrictions on duty-free items: you can bring up to 1 litre (0.22 imp gal; 0.26 US gal) of alcohol, reasonable amounts of perfume, and 200 sticks (often one carton with 10 packs containing 20 sticks) of cigarettes or 50 cigars or 100 g of tobacco.

You can import or export up to ~~₱50,000~~ in Philippine currency, or any foreign currency equivalent of up to ~~US\$10,000~~ (about ~~₱585,000~~ in 2024) without declaration and restriction. Anything in excess of ~~₱50,000~~ in Philippine currency must be declared to customs and authorised by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP). Foreign currencies that exceed ~~US\$10,000~~ in value must also be declared and travelers

will need to be ready to show evidence that such amounts were lawfully acquired and are not involved in criminal or other money-laundering activities. Personal and travelers cheques, as well as other currency-denominated bearer monetary instruments above those amounts are also covered by the same rules.



Note: Due to an outbreak of African swine fever (ASF) since 2019, all pork products must be declared and quarantined, or they will be confiscated and destroyed. Even if they pass quarantine, you might not be allowed to bring them into certain provinces; airlines and ferry lines may ask you if you have any.

Bringing in meat products, especially beef, from China or Brazil is also prohibited as of 2020.

(Information last updated 01 Sep 2020)

The Philippines enforces strict restrictions on bringing in any animal and plant products (in particular unprocessed fruits, vegetables, meat and fish), and you must declare any of them to both Bureau of Customs (BOC) and Department of Agriculture (DA) officials, or they will be confiscated. Processed or packaged foods are usually exempted. If you bring pets, they must be dewormed and vaccinated against rabies, and be declared to customs as well. All products from endangered species are confiscated.

You must declare also any CDs, DVDs, and electronics (including cell phones) in your checked baggage; items in carry-ons are often rarely checked, but can be subject to random inspection. Importing pornography, dangerous drugs, pirated or counterfeit goods and hazardous chemical products is prohibited. If you intend to bring firearms for certain purposes, such as recreational shooting, expect going through paperwork to secure a *Permit to Carry* and additional permits.

Illegal drugs: visitors and transiting passengers must expect hefty fines for carrying small amounts of drugs and paraphernalia, or 20 to 40 years in prison and deportation for larger amounts.

For a comprehensive guide on what and what not to bring on your baggage, see the Regulated/Restricted and Prohibited Importations (<http://customs.gov.ph/prohibited-restricted-importations/>) at the Bureau of Customs website.

Philippine customs officers are fairly notorious for corruption, but this is slowly changing; travelers cannot get away with not declaring any restricted items or contraband on checked baggage, with inspections using X-ray scanners and random checks using K-9 dogs. If you get caught, expect fines and possibly a jail term, deportation and/or being barred from reentry by immigration).

By plane

Although the Philippines is an archipelago, most visitors arrive by plane. If you live in an area with a large Filipino population, check out travel agencies catering to overseas Filipinos which often have fares keener than those generally advertised.

Flag carrier **Philippine Airlines** (<https://www.philippineairlines.com>), and low-cost carriers **Cebu Pacific** (<https://www.cebupacificair.com>) and **AirAsia** (<https://www.airasia.com>) are the major airlines in the country; all offer both international and domestic flights. Many other airlines operate international flights to the Philippines, and there are several smaller domestic carriers including some that use seaplanes or helicopters to reach destinations without an airport.

If you plan to travel around the various islands, it may be best to get an open jaw ticket; this can save much time back-tracking. Most open-jaw ticket combinations fly into Manila and out of Cebu or vice versa. It might also be possible to get a ticket with a stopover.

Most visitors entering the Philippines will fly in through the **Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA)** (<http://www.miaa.gov.ph>) (**MNL**^{IATA}) in Metro Manila. Traveling through Manila airport used to mean long delays, difficult transfers between terminals and sometimes corrupt officials. It has improved greatly, but some visitors still choose to avoid flying through Manila. There are two main alternatives:



Philippine Airlines, Asia's first (and now its oldest) commercial airline

- **Mactan-Cebu International Airport (CEB**^{IATA}) in Metro Cebu is the Philippines' second-busiest airport. It is in the center of the country, closer to destinations in the Visayas or Mindanao than Manila is.
- **Clark International Airport** (<https://clarkinternationalairport.com/>) (**CRK**^{IATA}) in Angeles City 85 km north of Manila is a popular hub for low-cost carriers serving Manila, although a few full-service carriers serve the airport as well.
- **Francisco Bangoy International Airport (DVO**^{IATA}) in Davao is served by Scoot from Singapore.

Manila, Cebu, Davao, and Clark are the country's main hubs for domestic flights. You can arrive at any of these airports and expect to reach more-or-less anywhere in the country reasonably easily.

Other airports around the country also have international flights.

- **Kalibo International Airport (KLO**^{IATA}) in Kalibo, Aklan (near Boracay). AirAsia has flights to Seoul and Busan in South Korea, and Cebu Pacific from Hong Kong and Seoul. Other airlines also have scheduled flights to Kalibo from points in South Korea, China and Taiwan.
- **Iloilo International Airport (ILO**^{IATA}) in Iloilo City is served by Cebu Pacific, with flights from Hong Kong and Singapore.
- **Puerto Princesa International Airport (PPS**^{IATA}) in Puerto Princesa, Palawan has direct flights from Taipei on Tiger Air Taiwan.
- **Panglao Airport (TAG**^{IATA}) in Bohol
- **Bicol International Airport (DRP**^{IATA}) in Legazpi

What to pay when leaving the Philippines?

Airports terminals in the country have a **terminal fee** which is now included in the ticket price.

For all airports the terminal fees for **international flights** are now included in the ticket price.

Some Filipinos and all foreigners who have been in the Philippines for more than one year are required to pay a **travel tax** of either ~~₱2700~~ **₱2200** if flying first class or ~~₱1620~~ **₱1620** for business or economy class. The tax is collected at a designated counter before check-in. One can also pay the tax online (<https://tieza.gov.ph/online-travel-tax-payment-system/>). In some cases the travel tax is included in the ticket price; check first and ask before paying.

Foreign nationals and *balikbayans* (former Filipino citizens) who are staying in the Philippines for less than one year are exempt from paying the travel tax, as are overseas Filipino workers (OFW),

As of 2023, several other cities have new airports being planned or under construction, so the list is likely to become longer in the 2020s.

Filipino students studying abroad on government scholarships, infants and employees of government or international agencies on official business. Reduced rates are available for minors (under 12 years), dependents of OFWs (under 21 years) and journalists on assignment.

By boat

- **Aleson Shipping Lines** has a ferry to Zamboanga from Sandakan, Malaysia. Schedule departs Zamboanga every Monday and Thursday noon. Economy class ₱2700 per way. Cabin ₱3100 per way.

This route may be dangerous; see warnings at [Sulu Islands](#) and [Zamboanga Peninsula](#).

Get around

The country's vast archipelagic nature makes travel by plane and boat very important for most visitors, especially between major cities. The country is quite large, especially when considering the area that is water, and its geography and population patterns mean that seemingly short distances, especially on land, may take more time to travel than you would expect.

Do what Filipinos do, and try to "commute" or take public transportation when possible. That said, travel by car or motorcycle is still an interesting way to discover the Philippines and find places off the beaten track, if you're willing to face the rather shocking situation on Philippine roads.

Finding your way

Philippine addresses roughly follow the Western system, but often have a lot more information, and directions or landmark details (e.g. opposite the high school, near the church/police station/barangay hall) are often provided. Street names exist in cities, but they become less common as you get into the countryside, and the intersecting street is often included (e.g. Rizal Ave cor. Mabini St). Building numbers exist in more central parts of larger cities, but are uncommon elsewhere; even when building numbers are assigned, they may or may not be marked on buildings, and may be poorly known to local residents.

Rural addresses may only have the barangay name, and the way to find them will be provided in parentheses. Most addresses should have the barangay (the smallest unit of local government in the Philippines) listed, but in some large cities (e.g. Manila), the district name is provided instead, and the barangay name would not be used if it is just a number, letter, or an alphanumeric combinations (usually in some city or town centers, often called *poblacion* areas, and some big cities like [Pasay](#) and [Caloocan](#)).

Subdivisions, which can be a named neighborhood within an urban barangay or a gated community, may have houses numbered by the block and lot number instead.

A 4-digit number that often appears at the beginning of an address (e.g. an Airbnb reservation may tell you that you'll be staying at "1004 Taft Ave, Manila") is typically not a building number (as in a North American address) but simply the ZIP code for the entire town or part of a city. With an address like this, make sure to get more specific direction information from the host.

Part of almost any Filipino address is the barangay (abbreviated as *Brgy.*), the lowest government unit of administration. Some barangays are divided into *sitios* or *puroks*, or smaller communities (sub-villages) or hamlets, especially in rural areas where settlements are scattered in far flung communities. In urban areas, most barangays no longer have sitios/puroks but contiguous residential subdivisions or communities. Urban barangays play the role that neighborhoods or districts would in other countries, and tend to have a large population in a small land area. Rural barangays are somewhat like townships or counties elsewhere, and often cover a large area.

If the address given to you includes not only the barangay name, but also the name (or, more commonly, the number) of the barangay's subdivision (*zone* or *purok*), this may actually be useful for helping you find your location, as driving through a barangay's main street you may see signs, such as "Purok 1", "Purok 2", etc.

If you take a taxi, jeepney or tricycle, ask for directions in advance. Filipinos will ask fellow locals, drivers, shop owners, or cops for the nearest landmark or building characteristics; doing the same will help you get around better. Knowing the surname of the person you are visiting is often more useful for finding the house within the block than the house number is, even if house numbers have been assigned on that block.

- **Barangay halls** may have detailed maps of an area, which should indicate the main roads or streets and major landmarks. Aside from local police, you can also ask **barangay tanods** (village watchers) stationed in roadside outposts; they will be happy to help you out but their directions can be vague to useless and they may have limited English skills depending on the area.
- **Google Maps** works well in large cities and even rural areas, and provides turn-by-turn navigation and traffic information, but coverage is messy depending on the place (with many places ending at odd spots due to the system misinterpreting addresses), and barangays are often not shown in addresses. As of 2020, Google Maps also provides indoor maps of some malls (usually those by Robinsons and Megaworld). Bus, train, and ferry schedules can also be found through Maps, but schedules for buses or ferries are hardly reliable or barely up-to-date.
- Alternatively, you can use **Waze**, **Apple Maps** or apps using OpenStreetMap data such as **Maps.me** or **OsmAnd**. Waze is widely used in the Philippines and particularly useful if driving on your own, with real-time traffic updates and alerts. Apple Maps for the Philippines also uses OpenStreetMap data and has indoor maps for some SM malls.

By plane

Since the Philippines is an archipelago, the easiest way to move between islands is by plane. **Philippine Airlines** (and its regional carrier, **PAL Express**), **Cebu Pacific** (and its regional carrier, **Cebgo**) and **Philippines AirAsia** have significant domestic operations, linking many major towns and cities. There are also several smaller carriers which serve resort destinations (such as Amanpulo in **Palawan**), as well as more remote destinations. While most cities are served by jet aircraft, some destinations are served by propeller-driven planes.

Flight delays

Flight delays can occur due to technical problems at major airports around the Philippines. If bad weather or smog accumulates throughout the day, so does the backlog of flights and this can cause a 2–3-hour delay in your domestic flight.

The route networks of most local airlines are heavily centered around Manila, Cebu, and Clark: flying between domestic points usually entails having to transit one of those cities, although direct flights between other major cities are slowly being introduced. Reaching Sulu and Tawi-Tawi by air is a special case: travelers must fly through Zamboanga City.

A significant majority of domestic flights in the Philippines are operated by low-cost carriers and are consequently economy-only: PAL is the only airline to offer business class on domestic flights. This does not mean however that fares are affordable: domestic seat sales are a common feature throughout the year, and all major airlines regularly offer promo fares on their websites. However, fares increase significantly during major peak travel seasons (particularly during Christmas, Holy Week and *Undas*), and in places served by only one airline (such as Camiguin or Marinduque), fares also increase during major provincial or town fiestas. Flights are frequently full during peak travel season, so it is advisable to book well in advance. Local airlines have regular "seat sales", advertising cheap fares for flights to domestic destinations. However, some tickets booked during a seat sale may only be used on dates well after the duration of the sale (sometimes up to a year after the sale) and advertised fares usually exclude government taxes and fuel surcharges.

Passengers departing on domestic flights from **Clark Airport** must pay a ~~₱150~~ terminal fee before entering the pre-departure area; all the other airports in the Philippines (including NAIA) have the fee included in the ticket.

Security is tight at Philippine airports, so provide extra time for landside checkpoints. Vehicles are checked by security before entering the airport, and luggage are screened at the terminal entrance and passengers pass through a metal detector. Landside in Philippine airports are usually off-limits to non-passengers.

By bus


Main article: Bus travel in the Philippines

Buses are a cheap and efficient way of travel in the Philippines by land, and cover much of the country.

Provincial buses are widely available, and include commuter services to a smaller city or town beyond 30 km (19 mi) from a large city, town-hopper services that stop practically at every barangay and small town along the way, and long-distance intercity runs (which may involve a ferry ride, which may or may not be included on the ticket price). Buses coming from hub cities like Manila, Cebu, or Davao tend to be better, with air conditioning, hard seats, and frequent departures.

If you have a separately ticketed flight on a continuing journey, or plan to fly out the next day, then you might want to consider flying earlier rather than later, that way you have plenty of time to relax, transit or make your hotel reservation for the night.



Provincial buses at the Dau bus station, Pampanga 

There is no single bus company covering the whole country, but there are over a hundred bus companies operating provincial services of various sizes. The largest bus companies are **Victory Liner** and **Five Star**, **Philtranco**, and **Vallacar Transit**, which have coverage of much of the country, operate multiple subsidiaries or brands, and have good customer service and safety records.

Provincial buses are available in five classes: ordinary (regular), air-conditioned, deluxe (executive), super deluxe, and luxury. **Luxury** buses, with wide reclining seats (or even beds), toilets and personal entertainment screens, are recommended for long-distance travel between large cities, and ticket prices are usually at par with the airlines. **Ordinary** buses are generally not recommended for foreign travelers; they are not air-conditioned, more crowded, less safe, and you'll find yourself the center of attention.

City buses are uncommon, and only Manila, Cebu and Davao have city bus systems. These systems are mostly privately operated (save for some government-run free local bus services), but follow a fare set by the national government. Buses used are a mix of accessible low-floor city buses and high-floor step-entry coaches. Manila and Cebu also have airport buses, and luxury express buses (branded **Point-to-Point** or **P2P**, who also serves provincial cities).

Most buses will have a conductor, who assists passengers in addition to collecting fares and punching the tickets, and in luxury buses, there will also be bus stewards or cabin attendants. They are helpful, but are less used to foreigners than airline staff.

Bus journeys in the Philippines may last more than two hours, and will involve a stopover at a roadside restaurant or a service area, usually tied to the bus company. Toilets are increasingly being equipped on buses used on long-haul routes, but older buses may not have one. Also expect food vendors hopping on and off the bus at the terminal or a major stop.

You can bring carry-ons weighing up to 10 kg (22 lb) on board, and anything heavier than that goes to the cargo compartment. You may have to pay for excess luggage or have them delivered to your final destination as freight. Pets can be carried on board on approved cages, but this depends on company rules. Policy on food and beverages vary, but are generally permitted as long as they are not messy or smelly. Smoking and vaping is prohibited on board and at the terminal or stop.

Cities and towns usually have one or more central bus stations, both government- or company-owned. Large bus stations may function like an airport or a major train station: you must purchase the tickets beforehand and go through a security check upon entering the departures area, and you board the bus through a gate displayed on the information boards. Small bus stations can be little more than a patch of concrete or dirt with basic amenities.

Foreigners are less often seen in buses, so expect exposure to common jarring behaviors like spitting and loud conversations and other annoyances like loud audio and people carrying live animals or all their heavy luggage on board. That said, a bus ride provides an opportunity to interact with locals and experience Filipino culture.

Ticketing

Provincial bus tickets can be bought onboard through the conductor, at the terminal, or online (through the company website or a booking portal). Tickets for long-distance or high-demand routes run out fast during major holiday seasons, so book well in advance or end up boarding the next bus with available

seats and buying the tickets onboard. Tickets only apply for one journey, so you must buy another ticket when you transfer.

On city buses, you also purchase the tickets through the conductor, though it is also possible to pay the fare by tapping a smart card whenever you board and get off. As again, there are no free transfers; you have to pay another fare when you change routes.

For both provincial and city lines, you can buy a smart card to pay for bus fares. Two nationally available smart cards are **Beep** (<https://www.beep.com.ph>) and **TripKo**. Beep is originally used on the Manila LRT and MRT, but is also used to pay for city buses and modern jeepneys in Manila and Cebu City, and can also be used with certain merchants. TripKo is used on buses and modern jeepneys accepting it, and while not usable for paying for goods, it has a larger coverage area with bus companies as far as Mindanao accepting it. When paying with a smart card, tap the card on a reader found near the driver (or at the secondary door if there is one) at entry or exit, where the fare calculated will be deducted entirely.

By train

The **Philippine National Railways** (PNR) fell into disrepair in the 1980s. This has resulted in all intercity and overnight services being suspended.

Luzon has two commuter services remaining. The **Inter-Provincial Commuter** runs between Calamba, San Pablo and Lucena, while the **Bicol Commuter** runs between Sipocot, Naga and Legazpi.

Metro Manila has one metro service and two light rail services available. Newer lines are under construction, including the first subway line in the Philippines.

By car

Main article: [Driving in the Philippines](#)

Roads in the Philippines vary greatly in quality from the paved multi-lane expressways of Luzon to the narrow dirt roads of remote mountain areas, which may complicate travel by car. Most major highways have two to four lanes and are normally paved with asphalt or concrete, although roads with more than four lanes, often divided, are common near major cities. Street layouts in most cities and towns have never changed since the Spanish colonial era, and roads there are often narrow, with lots of blind corners. Road atlases and maps are available at bookstores throughout the country, and are very helpful when driving, especially when driving alone.

Foreign driver's licenses are legally valid in the Philippines for up to 90 days after arrival, after which a Philippine driver's license is required. It may also be a good idea to carry your passport showing that your last entry into the Philippines was less than 91 days ago.

Vehicular traffic in the Philippines moves on the **right**, and the vast majority of road signs are in English, with a few in Filipino. Road signs are a mix of American and European standards. Road marking are usually white, the same as in most of Europe, save for the no-passing lines, that uses yellow, like in most of the Americas. While most major highways have good signage and markings, it is generally less common in inner city and minor roads, more so in rural roads in the poorest regions.

Traffic rules are largely modeled on American rules. Right turns on a red light is permitted unless posted otherwise. Single or double yellow lines are used to indicate places where it is illegal to overtake another vehicle. The innermost lane on expressways are only for overtaking, and are signed as such. That being said, most Filipinos flout most traffic rules, road rage is a serious problem and crashes can be deadly. Be particularly careful with motorcyclists, which frequently weave through traffic, accumulate at the stop line in intersection, and speed and bank like maniacs on sharp curves, bends and turns.

By motorcycle

Motorcycles and scooters (either can be called **moto** in Filipino English) are extremely common in the country, mostly Japanese brands plus some Filipino brands such as Rusi. Most are in the 125-200cc range. They are available for rent (typically at around ₱300 a day) in many cities and tourist areas, and it is common for long-term visitors to buy one.

Motorcycle riding here is not for the faint of heart and motorcyclists are fairly often killed, mainly because of dangerous driving habits like drunk driving or illegal overtaking. See [Driving in the Philippines](#).

There is a national law requiring helmets, but it is not consistently enforced in all regions.

Motorcycle taxis

Motorcycle taxis (*habal-habal*) are available, but remain illegal and unregulated as of 2020. In some places, such as [Samal](#), they are the only transportation option, though almost all of them will be unlicensed. There are no meters; you have to negotiate a price, and some drivers may try to overcharge tourists or may feel they are entitled to something extra because you want to be the only passenger where they could carry two or even three Filipinos. If you have a choice, either a tricycle or a jeepney will usually be both safer and more comfortable.

In large cities, it is possible to hail a *habal-habal* through apps such as **Angkas** and **GrabBike**. The app-hailed services have qualified and trained drivers identifiable through a uniform with the name of the company.

By taxi

Taxis are generally available within the major cities but are usually not used for travel across the various provinces and regions.

When hailing a taxi in the cities, ensure the meter is on and pay the metered fare. A tip of ₱10 is acceptable. Also, make sure you have coins and small denomination bills, as the drivers often claim not to have change in an effort to obtain a larger tip, and in morning periods, many drivers only accept coins as payment (watch out for the ubiquitous *Barya lang po sa umaga* sign or sticker)! Moreover, don't be surprised if



Motorcycles first at traffic lights! ☹

Taxi fares

Most of the taxi drivers nowadays charge people with fares not based on the meters, especially during peak hours. If you encounter this say "no" and say that drivers don't have a right to give you a fare that is double and not based on the meters, this is usually encountered by tourists as well

drivers want to bypass the meter during rush hour. Most taxis have the flag down rate of ~~₱40~~ with each 300 meters cost ~~₱3.50~~ while Yellow cab taxis are more expensive with a flag-down rate of ~~₱70~~ with each 300 meters cost ~~₱4~~ (April 2011).

You may book a taxi using GPS enabled mobile apps such as Singapore-based "Grab" and "Easy Taxi" for a small fee on top of the metered fare. This is better than hailing a cab because you can see the number of available taxis and their location via GPS. Promos to make your journey cheaper are also occasionally available — check with the app. First-time users should look for promo codes to avail of discounts before registering. Once you have a confirmed taxi booking, the driver's name, photo, plate number, and a computer-generated model of the vehicle will appear on your mobile device and you can communicate with your driver to let him know exactly where you are. Grab is available in many major cities across the country.

By boat

Inter-island trips

After planes and buses, ships are the next cheapest way of travel in the country.

Ferry trips to other islands can take over 24 hours, depending on distance. The only nation-wide ferry line is **2Go Travel** (<http://travel.2go.com.ph>). From Cebu City, there are smaller ferry lines: **Trans Asia Shipping Lines** (<http://www.transasiashipping.com>), **Cokaliong Shipping Lines** (<http://www.cokaliongshipping.com>), **Lite Ferries** (<http://www.liteferries.com.ph>) and **Oceanjet** (<http://www.oceanjet.net>). **Montenegro Shipping Lines** (<https://www.montenegrolines.com.ph>) and **Starlite Ferries** (<https://www.starliteferries.com>) operate out from Batangas City, but Montenegro also have routes from Manila and between other islands.

Roll-on/roll-off (RORO) ferries are common. Most RORO services form the nationwide Nautical Highway System (NHS), composed of three separate routes including the ferry routes themselves and highways connecting the ports. Interisland bus trips usually take these, and are included to the fare as additional charges. With the RORO ferries, it is possible to drive across islands. On shorter routes, instead of RORO ferries, vehicles are carried onto barges.

Schedules can be found on shipping line websites or on newspapers with sections for ferry ads. Ferries can sometimes be delayed because all the cargo and passengers has not yet boarded, or because of weather.

For shorter hops, you'll likely to board passenger pump boats (motor *bancas*), outrigger boats fitted with an outboard motor. Longer, high-capacity pump boats operate on some high-demand routes such as Batangas City-Puerto Galera and San Jose-Coron.

as middle class-elite class Filipinos. If this happens get out of the taxi, threaten the driver you will call the police hotline; **Philippine National Police** (<http://www.pnp.gov.ph>) (PNP) +63 2 722-0650 start dialing your cellphone to make him believe you are calling the police or either call the **MMDA** (<http://www.mmda.gov.ph>) (Metro Manila Development Authority) hotline; **136** if you're within Manila, you can also text the police at 2920 and your message must be as follows; PNP(space)(message), for your complaints. Some taxis have meters which give out receipts; ask for a receipt if they have one.

Travel by boat is generally unsafe, and overloaded ferries are not uncommon. The Philippines has had some of the world's worst maritime disasters in peacetime. Check the latest weather reports before travel by ferry, as some captains are willing to sail even when a typhoon is approaching. Bringing your own life preserver is strongly recommended (but no substitute for common sense). Better travel by plane than take the risk.

As of the late 2022, the fare from Bulalacao (Mindoro) to Caticlan (Panay) is about ₱800, with a ₱600 fee for a bicycle.

Metro Manila

Get around Manila with Pasig's **Ferry Service** (<https://mmda.gov.ph/home/2-uncategorised/5086-pasig-river-ferry-service.html%7CPasig>), waterbuses are available in stations around the historical river of Pasig. In 2022, the ferry was made free; it's not clear for how long this will continue. Previously, fares ranged from ₱25, ₱35 and ₱45. For students and youth fares are ₱20 regardless of distance.

By van

UV Express (Utility Vehicle Express), also known in Cebu as "V-Hire" and formerly but still commonly called "FX", from their use of the Toyota Tamaraw FX minivan), is a minibus or minivan shuttle service, usually operated by white Toyota or Nissan vans with route and operator markings, but modern jeepney-type vehicles are also being used in some newer routes. They are common in short routes in the provinces, and are faster than the bus or jeepney as they travel with only a few stops, but the vehicles are often packed full, the ceiling is low for tall foreigners, there is little space for bulky luggage, and fares are more expensive than the regular bus (but cheaper than the jeepney).

UV Express have fixed routes like buses or jeepneys, but they have fewer stops, with pick-up at and near the starting terminal and drop-off near and at the end terminal. The fare is a fixed rate, being ₱2 per kilometer times the point-to-point length of the route, and is collected by the conductor who occupies the front passenger seat or a fare collector at the terminal. UV terminals are usually at a bus station or mall, but there are also dedicated stations, which may serve one or more UV routes. Departures are irregular.

Beware of unlicensed, *colorum* passenger vans, which do not have any markings and have private vehicle license plates or "not for hire" markings. Such vehicles mostly use informal terminals near private bus stations and malls, but they also turn up at government-run terminals. These vehicles often involve many stops than their licensed counterparts, fares can be higher than their legal regulated counterparts and journey times are longer as they make frequent stops. Such services are most commonly found around Metro Manila and the provinces south of it.

Licensed, government-accredited tourist van shuttles that are booked through the phone and provide door-to-door service to your hotel from the airport (and vice versa) are also available in some tourist areas. They are slower than a taxi as they stop at hotels along the way, but are often cheaper.

You can also rent a van if traveling with a group of 10-18 people; rental rates usually start from ~~₱1,000~~ a day (and the cost shared by the group), and meals at a restaurant and stays at a hotel, resort or guest house upon your request are usually included. Listings for these are often hard to find, however, and generally cater to Filipinos.

By jeepney

Jeepneys are common throughout the country and are by far the most affordable way to get around most major urban areas. Traffic signs referring to them usually call them "PUJ", Public Utility Jeep.

The original jeepneys were based on jeeps left behind by the Americans after World War II; Filipinos lengthened the body and added benches along the sides to seat more people. Today most new jeepneys are based on imported used vehicles, but many older ones are still running. Jeepneys typically have seating for about 20 people, but they often carry 30 or more with people in the aisle or on the running boards. A few passengers can sit up front with the driver; these are the best seats.



"King of the Philippine Roads" 

Jeepneys are often quite crowded and generally not very comfortable (especially if you are tall), there is usually little space inside for luggage (though most have a roof rack), there may be pickpockets, and you might encounter annoying behavior such as drivers smoking or passengers engaging in loud conversations. However every visitor should try them at least once since they are definitely part of a "Philippines experience". For a budget traveler, they will likely be one of the most used transport options.

In cities jeepneys generally run on fixed routes, have fixed fares depending on distance (often about ~~₱12~~ for up to 4 km (2.5 mi) and an additional ~~₱2.25~~ per km as of 2023), and will stop if you wave at them. Usually there are signs on the side of the vehicle indicating the route. Within Manila and other major cities, you will find multiple jeepneys per route so you rarely need to wait long to catch one.

In the provinces, jeepneys also connect towns and cities. For these longer trips there are often discounts for seniors or students, though not usually on trips within a city. For a trip of a few kilometers from a city to a suburb or a few dozen kilometers to a nearby town jeepneys are often the best way to travel. For longer journeys, however, buses are more comfortable.

Some jeepneys have a conductor to collect the fares, but on others you pay the driver. It is fairly common for people sitting at the back to get other passengers to relay their money to the driver; this is easier if you have exact change. It is also common for passengers to clink coins against metal parts of the roof when they want off; the sound carries forward to the driver.

Beware of *colorum* jeepneys which do not have a marked route. They are best avoided, but in some places, they are common, and may be the only ones available. See #Stay safe. Even on legitimate jeepneys there can be problems with drivers illegally "cutting trip", which is when you pay the full fare to your intended destination and you will be forced to alight midway on the route or somewhere near your destination without getting a refund due to a traffic jam, roadblock or lack of waiting passengers.

In some areas there are vehicles much like a jeepney, but built on a smaller chassis so they can carry only about a dozen passengers. Locals will usually call these **multicabs**.

Modern jeepneys, operated by companies or cooperatives instead of individuals as with the traditional vehicles, are slowly being phased in, especially around Manila. While they are still jeepneys, the vehicles take the form of a minibus, having an entry door on the right side. Fares are slightly expensive (starting from ~~₱1.14~~ for the first 4 km, increasing by ~~₱1.40-1.70~~), but it is possible to pay with smart cards (e.g. Beep) instead of cash, and the vehicles are more comfortable, with air conditioning and standing room.

By tricycle

Traysikels (Filipino word, pronounced much like the English one) are tricycles, motorcycle-and-sidecar rigs; the motorcycles are typically Japanese machines in the 125-200cc range. The design seems to vary from region to region, but within a given town most of the traysikels will be of the same type. In some places the sidecars seat four, in other places only two.

In some of the smaller cities, these are the main means of transport within the town, and jeepneys are used only for journeys between towns. In a few areas tricycles are used for out-of-town journeys of up to about 25 km (15 miles) as well.

These may not be to the liking of most foreigners, as they are cramped and quite open to noise and weather. In most places they are shared vehicles; expect to ride along with other people going approximately the same way and to take the odd detour as the driver diverts to deliver a passenger at his or her destination.



Traysikels

Most fares in any town are ~~₱10-80~~, depending mainly on the distance. Most fares are per person, but some are per tricycle. In some places the fare is legally regulated. Sometimes there are fixed fares. In more rural areas, rates are different. Sometimes, especially for longer runs, you will need to bargain over the fare, and some drivers will try to overcharge foreigners.

In general, most journeys are reasonably safe and pleasant, and quite cheap by foreign standards, but there can be problems. Some drivers may smoke while driving (despite smoking bans on public utility vehicles, including tricycles) or overcharge, and quite a few drive rather adventurously, frequently violating traffic rules, like illegal overtaking or ignoring tricycle prohibitions (primarily on heavily travelled highways). Some of the motorcycles are quite noisy, belch smoke or have inadequate headlights or taillights.

There is usually a luggage rack on the back. If you use it, make sure the driver ties your things down; otherwise they might be stolen or fly out when you hit a bump. Large or valuable luggage should ride in the passenger area; on tricycles with four-seat sidecars the front seat can be folded up to make room. You will usually have to pay extra for this, which is fair since the luggage prevents the driver taking more passengers.

You may find tricycles resembling Indian auto rickshaws or Thai tuk-tuks in some areas, especially in Mindanao (e.g. the four-wheel *motorelas* of Cagayan de Oro); they have passengers sitting behind the driver instead of in a separate sidecar. Indian-made auto-rickshaws (often Bajaj or TVS) – some powered

with compressed natural gas – are also becoming common in the Philippines. The downside is they can only carry 3 to 4 passengers (there is no extra seat for little kids or another passenger), but the upside is that they have higher headroom, less engine noise, and more comfortable seats.

In many areas, **pedicabs**, also called *trisikad* or *padyak* in some areas, refers to a pedal-powered vehicle, either a bicycle-and-sidecar rig or a cycle rickshaw with two seats in back and the rider pedaling up front. In other areas, "pedicab" is used for motorized sidecar rigs as well.

Electric trikes can be found in some areas, like in Manila.

By bicycle

One can see a lot of Filipinos bicycling, both for utility trips in cities and towns and as recreation. Bicycle stores are available in most cities; in Manila, they concentrate in Quiapo, along the block of Quezon Blvd north-east of the Minor Basilica of the Black Nazarene. Generally, bicycle stores can be found with Google Maps. A used bicycle can also be bought through a Philippines classified web site, such as Carousell (formerly OLX). Many Japan Surplus stores have used bikes at good prices.

As of 2022, there is no national bicycle helmet law in the Philippines, although some politicians opine in favor of introducing one. Some municipalities do have helmet ordinances, however, such as Quezon City (where it is enforced) and Makati. Bicycle helmets are available from purchase in many bike stores from ₱500 and up.

Once you are outside of the snarled city center traffic, riding on a Philippine road may be remarkably pleasant. Many highways are 4 lanes wide, where the inner lanes are for faster vehicles (cars, trucks, and good motorcycles), while the outer lanes are used by slower conveyances. Elsewhere, good shoulders often exist, but do watch for illegally parked vehicles and passing vehicles.

Cycling across cities is possible, but hard. Many bicycle lanes often share with traffic lanes (or none marked at all), and are often not observed. Vehicle-bicycle collisions are quite common and can be deadly.

In most areas one does need to carry a lot of drinking water, because when passing through small towns and even some villages you are likely to see drinking water distribution kiosks; those primarily serve to distribute water to local residents and business in large 20 litres (4.4 imp gal; 5.3 US gal) bottles, but the staff will be glad to refill your water bottle for free. These kiosks typically operate during normal business hours.

Riding at night is possible, provided you have good lights and reflectors. The hours between 10PM (when it gets cooler) and 4:30AM (when traffic seems to start) am are perhaps the best, as this allows one both to beat the traffic and to avoid the day's heat.

When traveling between islands, it's usually possible to take the bicycle on a ferry. Expect to pay a fee on the order of 2/3 or 3/4 of the passenger's fare. Sometimes you pay for the bike when buying your own ticket at the ticket office; sometimes, you just give cash to the ship crew when boarding.



A Bajaj tricycle in Bulacan



See

The Philippines can give you the tropical island experience of your life. Its beautiful sandy beaches, warm climate, century old churches, magnificent mountain ranges, dense rain forests, rich culture and smiling people are some of the attractions that you can see and experience on this archipelago composed of 7,107 islands. You can experience the country's rich and unique culture in different ways like touring old Spanish churches, joining colorful *fiestas* (festivals) and by enjoying exotic and tasty cuisine. But perhaps the greatest way to experience Filipino culture is by riding a jeepney.

Historical and cultural attractions

The Spanish began colonizing the Philippines in the 1560s and held it until the Americans took over in 1898. Almost every town in the country has a few fine old buildings from that period, at least a Catholic church. A few have much more than that, whole districts full of old buildings including the remains of Spanish fortifications:

- **Manila** is the capital of the Philippines; it was established during the Spanish colonial era. Despite being a city with modern skyscrapers, Manila still has its rich historical and cultural heritage. Its old churches, colonial structures, neo-classical buildings and historical landmarks give this city its unique charm.
- **Intramuros** (Spanish for 'within the walls') is the oldest district and historic core of Manila. Intramuros is home to Manila's finest and oldest structures such as the Manila Cathedral and Fort Santiago. Despite being heavily damaged during World War II, Intramuros still has its Spanish colonial character.
- **Cebu City** was the first Spanish settlement in the Philippines, and was the capital for a few years. Its Colon district has some of the country's most important historical and heritage spots including Fort San Pedro and the Basilica of Santo Niño. The city's **Sinulog Festival** attracts thousands of tourists and pilgrims; it is one of the country's most popular festivals.
- **Baguio** is at a considerable elevation and was used as a summer capital to escape the heat of Manila.

Several towns have particularly fine collections of heritage buildings, including many heritage homes built for important Spaniards or for wealthy Filipino families. Many of these are still private homes and by no means all are open to the public, but some have become museums and others allow tours.

- **Vigan**, in the Ilocos Region of northern Luzon, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, a Spanish colonial town though also with considerable Chinese influence. It may make you feel like you are somewhere in Latin America or Mediterranean Europe.
- **Taal**, in the Batangas region southwest of Manila, is the closest such town to the capital. It may be a convenient stop for those headed for the beaches of Puerto Galera, though it takes you off the direct route.
- **Silay** is on Negros, near Bacolod.
- **Baclayon** is on Bohol, near Tagbilaran.



The historic town of Vigan



Since the country was a Spanish colony for 300 years, Baroque churches can easily be found around the Philippines. These churches will look almost like those which you might see in Spain and elsewhere in Europe. Some of the most iconic in the country are:

- **San Agustin Church** in Manila
- **Miag-ao Church** in Iloilo City
- **Paoay Church** in Ilocos Norte
- **Santa Maria Church** in Ilocos Sur

These churches were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site under the collective title Baroque Churches of the Philippines (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/677>).

Beaches and islands

Beaches and diving are among the best-known tourist attractions of the country; with 7,107 islands there is certainly enough choice. Many beaches have bright white sand, but beige, gray, black or even pink sand are also found. Most of the diving is around coral reefs; many are reachable by just walking into the water, or on a day trip by boat from one of the resorts. A few such as Coron feature wreck diving and some such as Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park involve longer trips on live-aboard boats.

- **10 Boracay**. This is by far the country's best-known beach resort area, has been rated one of the best islands in the world by several magazines, and attracts thousands of international and local travelers every year. It has powdery white sand beaches and azure waters, and is a highly-developed area offering a range of activities including scuba diving, snorkeling, windsurfing, kitesurfing, cliff diving and parasailing. After any of these activities, you can indulge in a relaxing massage right on the white sand beach or at one of the spas.



Several other beach areas are almost as well-known as Boracay, but less crowded and perhaps somewhat less expensive. Many travelers prefer one or another of these over Boracay.

- **11 Alona Beach** (*Panglao Island, Bohol*). Bohol is an island province with many beaches, some other attractions, and a wide selection of both luxury and affordable resorts. Alona is its most popular destination.



- **12 Coron Island** (*Calamian Islands*). This area boasts exquisite beaches and hundreds of limestone formations topped with dense rainforests. It is best-known as one of the world's best destinations for **wreck diving**; the Americans sank a number of Japanese ships here during World War II. Rent a kayak to paddle around the islands to see the beautiful and well-preserved seascape of Coron.



Panglao, Bohol



- **13 El Nido** (*Palawan province*). A coastal town with pristine beaches, crystal clear waters, steep limestone cliffs, stunning islets and diving spots that can compete with any of the best in the world.
- **14 Sabang** (*Puerto Galera, Mindoro*). This town offers excellent diving, several diving schools, and a good selection of restaurants with international menus. The nightlife is lively to say the least; the place is famous for partying and prostitution. If those do not appeal, consider the quieter White Beach on the other side of Puerto Galera.

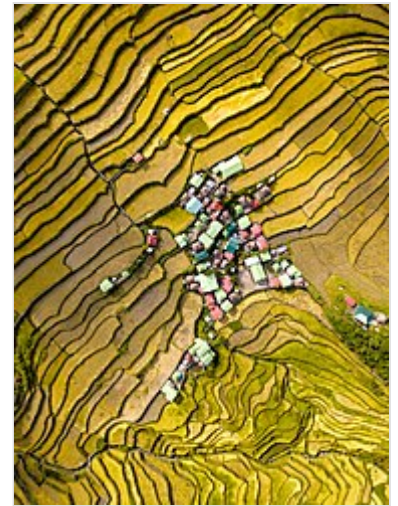
Mactan Island in Cebu; **Santa Cruz Island** in Zamboanga; **Pagudpud** in Ilocos; **Laiya Beach** in Batangas and **White Island** in Camiguin are other popular beach destinations in the Philippines that are really worth visiting.

Landscapes

See also: National parks and protected areas of the Philippines, Volcanoes#Philippines

Sick of beaches? The Philippines has other stunning landscapes to offer; aside from beautiful beaches, there are mountain ranges, dense jungles, majestic rice terraces, scenic lakes, picturesque waterfalls and hidden caves.

If we think of the Philippines, the usual things that goes into our mind are just group of islands with warm sunny days. The **Cordillera Region** is not the usual Philippine destination that we see on postcards and travel magazines. If you visit this mountainous region, take jackets and sweaters rather than just t-shirts, because this region is located in the cool highlands of the northern part of the country. Rice terraces are one of the most visited tourist attractions in the region, the world-famous **Banaue Rice Terraces** and **Rice Terraces of the Philippine Cordilleras** can be found here. These rice terraces were built almost 2000 years ago by ancient Filipinos and still maintain their beauty. Nearby is the town of **Sagada** in the **Mountain Province**. Known for its hanging coffins and limestone caves, this town is an ideal destination for backpackers.



Rice Terraces of the Cordillera Region

As in neighboring Indonesia, the Philippine islands were mainly created by volcanic action and the country's tourist attractions include several volcanoes. All the major islands have some mountain areas suitable for hikers, though there are few climbs difficult enough to fascinate serious mountaineers.

- **1 Mount Apo** (*near Davao in Mindanao*). This dormant stratovolcano, near Davao on Mindanao, is the highest mountain in the Philippines at 2,954 meters (9,692 ft) and a popular climbing destination. It is also one of the most diverse areas; it is home to over 272 bird species, 111 of which are endemic to the area. The mountain also has four major lakes, these lakes are famous mountaineers' camping sites and a stopover towards the peak. [W](#)
- **2 Mount Pinatubo** (*near Bacolor in Pampanga province*). A stratovolcano which had a VEI-6 eruption in 1991, the second largest on Earth in the 20th century. Today, it is one of the country's top climbing destinations due to its canyons, 4x4 terrain and its scenic caldera lake. [W](#)
- **3 Mayon Volcano** (*in Albay province*). Often described as the world's most perfect volcano cone, Mayon had a fatal eruption in 1993. [W](#)
- **4 Taal Volcano** (*in Batangas province*). This is a complex volcano system described as a "lake in a volcano in a lake" and one of the most picturesque landscapes in the Philippines. Often reached via the nearby city of Tagaytay, where package tours to the volcano are offered. It is the Philippines's second most active volcano, with history of destructive eruptions and one of the "Decade Volcanoes". An eruption in early 2020 forced the evacuation of several towns. [W](#)

All of these except Apo are active volcanoes and can be *extremely dangerous*; see [Volcanoes#Stay_safe](#) for relevant advice.

Head to the island of [Bohol](#) to see the famous **Chocolate Hills**, and no they are not made out of chocolate, they are grass-covered limestone domes that turn brown during the dry season, hence their name. There are more than 1,268 hills scattered in the area. The Chocolate Hills are one of the most iconic and popular tourist spots in the country. Another destination which is popular in Bohol is the **Philippine Tarsier Sanctuary** in [Corella](#), it is a 7.4-hectare forest sanctuary where over 100 tarsiers roam freely, here you can have a chance to get up close to the **Philippine Tarsier**, one of the smallest primates in the world.

Do

- **Aerial sports** - An annual Hot Air Balloon festival is held in January and February in Clark, [Angeles](#) in [Pampanga](#). Hot air balloons are displayed, and there is skydiving, and other activities.
- **Basketball** is the most popular sport in the Philippines, don't miss the PBA (<https://www.pba.com.ph/>) and UAAP (<https://www.uaapsports.com/>) basketball tournaments. A more Filipino experience is watching any of the *paliga* games held in barangays during the hot months, if you can bear the heat; streetball is also quite popular with Filipinos as well.
- **Bentosa** and **Hilot** are Filipino alternative ways of healing, *Bentosa* is a method where a cup cover a tea light candle then it flames out and it drains out all the pain on the certain part of the body, *Hilot* is just the Filipino way of massaging.
- **Board sailing** - Waves and winds work together making the country a haven for board sailors. [Boracay](#), [Subic Bay](#) and [Anilao](#) in [Batangas](#) are the main destinations.
- **Casinos**: [Metro Manila](#) has a wide collection of casinos and entertainment destinations. Explore the *Resorts World Manila*, the country's first luxurious casino integrated resort, and the newly opened *Solaire Resorts and Casino*. The *Entertainment City* is home to four integrated casino resorts, including the *Okada Manila*.
- **Cycling**: Cycling in the Philippines has experienced a surge in popularity, emerging as a favored outdoor activity and an exciting mode of exploration. Known for its diverse landscapes, the country attracts both locals and international enthusiasts seeking thrilling biking adventures. The rise of bicycling tourism has further contributed to this trend, with numerous cycling tours showcasing the Philippines' scenic beauty and cultural richness. As the nation embraces cycling as a lifestyle and tourism draws, the Philippines stands out as an increasingly sought-after destination for cyclists of all levels, providing an immersive experience that combines adventure, culture, and the joy of two-wheeled exploration.
- **Caving** - The archipelago has some unique cave systems. [Sagada](#) in Luzon and [Mabinay](#) on Negros are popular destination for caving.



Sailing in [Boracay](#)



Whitewater rafting in the Cagayan de Oro River



- **Festivals** - Each municipality, town, city and province has its own festival, either religious or in honor of the city or a historical reason.

See also: [*Festivals in the Philippines*](#) for more information.

- **Golf** - Almost every province has a golf course.
- **Karaoke** - Also known as *videoke*, karaoke is a popular pastime in the Philippines, with households commonly renting or buying a karaoke machine for events. Karaoke in bars or restaurants are widely available, either in the form of karaoke boxes or a coin-operated karaoke machine.
- **Medical tourism** - Most medical tourists come from America and Europe as health care here costs as much as 80% less than abroad. Most of the hospitals suggested for medical tourism are in [Metro Manila](#). Alternative medicine is also popular with spas, faith healing and other fringe therapies widespread throughout the archipelago.
- **National parks** - National parks number around 60-70, they include mountains and coral reefs.
- **Mountain biking** - The archipelago has dozens of mountains and is ideal for mountain bikers. Destinations include [Baguio](#), [Davao](#), [Iloilo City](#), [Banaue](#), [Mount Apo](#) and [Guimaras](#).
- **Rock climbing** - Apo Island, Atimonan, El Nido, Putting Bato, Wawa Gorge have the best sites in the archipelago for rock climbing.
- **Sea kayaking** - Caramoan Islands in [Camarines Sur](#), [Palawan](#), [Samar](#) and [Siargao](#) are popular.
- **Spas** are found near beaches, financial capitals, etc.
- **Trekking** - Mountain ranges and peaks offer cool weather for trekking and it might give you a sight of the beautiful exotic flora and fauna of the country. Mt. Kanlaon and [Mount Pulag](#) are good trekking spots.
- **Visita iglesia** - Church-visiting Catholic churches, holy sites, shrines, and basilicas. If you are religious try this, if you love art and architecture, churches are the best way to define what Filipino architecture.
- **Whitewater rafting** - There is good whitewater rafting in [Mindanao](#), both in the north around [Cagayan de Oro](#) and in the south near [Davao](#).



Baguio mountains



Scuba diving

See [*Diving in the Philippines*](#), [*Scuba diving*](#) and [*Snorkeling*](#) for more information

Scuba diving is spectacular in the Philippines. While there are many fine dive sites, including some in nearly every region of the country, two stand out as among the world's best:

- [Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park](#) is a Philippines National Park and a [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#). It is a large area of coral reef, mostly shallow water with a few small islets and a sensational range of marine life. It is generally reached on live-aboard boats operating from [Puerto Princesa](#) on [Palawan](#).
- [Coron](#) has excellent wreck diving because the US Navy sank about ten Japanese ships in shallow water there in 1944.

Buy

Money

The Philippine **peso** (or *piso*), ISO code: **PHP**, is the official currency and is the only currency used for most transactions. It is usually denoted by the symbol "₱" (prefixing prices using **P** without the double strike or **PHP** is also common, especially amongst those who type prices or amounts on their computers or phones as the "₱" symbol isn't straightforward to generate on keyboards). One peso is subdivided into 100 centavos (or *sentimo*), denoted with the symbol ¢ (or c). Wikivoyage uses ₱ for pesos.

- **Coins:** 1¢, 5¢, 10¢, 25¢, ₱1, ₱5, ₱10, and ₱20. There are two sets of coins in circulation: the 2018 "New Generation" series and the older 1995 "New Design" series. The 2018 coins are all nickel-plated steel; there is no 10¢ coin, and ₱20 coins were introduced in late 2019. Coins from 1995 are of various materials and colors.
- **Bills:** ₱20 (orange), ₱50 (red), ₱100 (two versions; purplish blue (original) and strong mauve or violet (updated)), ₱200 (green), ₱500 (yellow), and ₱1000 (light blue; two versions; 2010 paper version, 2022 polymer version). Older versions of each bill were demonetized in 2016. The old bills have similar colors to their new counterparts, have the same people at the front (except for the ₱500 bill which also features former President Corazon C. Aquino and the polymer ₱1000 note which feature the Philippine eagle instead) but rather than historical sites at the back, the newer bills feature Filipino natural wonders and species unique to the country.

U.S. dollars may be accepted in some circumstances (particularly to buy international flights and perform some e-commerce transactions), but don't count on it to buy even high-end big ticket items.

Travelers usually see ₱20 and ₱50 bills, and ₱1, ₱5 and ₱10 coins as the most useful for common purchases. Centavo coins are nearly worthless: convenience stores, supermarkets and bus conductors are the few to hand them out as change, but they are commonly thrown away. *Always have some coins in hand during morning hours*; jeepney, taxi, tricycle drivers, and some merchants follow the *barya lang [po] sa umaga* rule, insisting they need coins to give back as change later in the day. Beware of counterfeits: bills from ₱100 and above are common targets for counterfeiters, but fake ₱20 and ₱50s also show up, especially in small shops.



Clownfish in Moalboal Reef,
Cebu Province

Exchange rates for Philippine pesos

As of March 2024:

- US\$1 ≈ ₱56
- €1 ≈ ₱60
- UK£1 ≈ ₱70
- AU\$1 ≈ ₱36
- CA\$1 ≈ ₱41
- Japanese ¥100 ≈ ₱37

Exchange rates fluctuate. Current rates for these and other currencies are available from [XE.com \(https://www.xe.com/currency/php-philippine-peso\)](https://www.xe.com/currency/php-philippine-peso)



Obverse of the 2018
₱5 coin

The Philippines is fundamentally a *cash-only society*; it's just fine to carry wads of ₱1000 bills for medium to large purchases, though it's also risky. Some machines like coin-operated vending machines or coin laundries only accept ₱5 coins while *pisonet* computers accept ₱1. Beverage vending machines generally accept bills up to ₱50 in value.

Currency conversion

Money changers are common in malls and tourist areas, but less so elsewhere. A rule of thumb is that the more currency you wish to exchange, the more favorable the rates can be. Banks are widely available to exchange currency but usually impose a minimum amount (usually around US\$100), generally have worse rates than money changers, and are usually open only from 9AM to 3PM (sometimes 4:30PM) on weekdays. However, you can enjoy their air conditioning during a long wait. **Bank of the Philippine Islands** (<https://www.bpi.com.ph/>) (BPI) and **Banco de Oro** (<https://www.bdo.com.ph/>) (BDO) have longer operating hours (sometimes as late as 7PM) in some locations.

Don't exchange money in stalls along the streets as some of them might be exchanging your money for counterfeit money. Contact **Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas** (<https://www.bsp.gov.ph/>) (Central Bank of the Philippines or BSP) if you suspect the money you've been given is counterfeit. Money changers do exist at department stores, supermarkets and hotels but the rates are highly unfavorable to customers and some will only exchange into pesos. Pawnshops are usually the best bet for reasonable rates but avoid exchanging coins.

Banking

Having a Philippine bank account is useful for long-term travelers or permanent residents, but not for an ordinary tourist or business traveler. International banks like **Citibank** or **HSBC** have only a few branches in large cities and opening a new account requires a huge deposit. The major local banks, like **PNB** (Philippine National Bank), **BDO** (Banco de Oro), **BPI** (Bank of the Philippine Islands) or **Metrobank**, are better. Foreigners must have a valid passport, a foreign resident registration card and proof of a Philippines address – most often the residency certificate you got from the barangay. Most bank staff can speak English well, and you can also apply for a US dollar account with any of the major local banks, but some banks and other financial services may be reluctant to open accounts for US residents due to onerous reporting requirements imposed by US federal law on banks that service such customers.

Most of the 20,000 ATMs are connected to the local **BancNet** ATM network. Most banks will have at least one ATM on bank premises, and there are lots of off-site ATMs in shopping malls and other commercial buildings, mostly in the cities. In rural areas, often the only available ATMs are from the Land Bank of the Philippines or PNB.

International networks like Plus and Cirrus are accessible with many ATMs, with Cirrus being more predominant, although many ATMs support both. Some banks also support other cards, including American Express, Diners Club, JCB and China UnionPay. Withdrawals are often limited to ₱10,000 depending on the bank. Most ATM operators charge a usage fee of ₱250 for using foreign cards in addition to your bank's fees. The best ATMs to withdraw money from are at one of the **HSBC** branches (just three left out of eight in Metro Manila, and one each in Cebu City and Davao), where you can take out ₱40,000 per transaction with *no usage fee*. If these are not an option, the best bet to get ₱20,000 (with

a fee) are **BPI** (especially those attached to an office, but often available 24/7), **Maybank** (mainly in larger cities), and possibly some of **RCBC**. Most ATMs, however, dispense only ₱10,000 per transaction, and the limit may be even less in a smaller town.

Credit card holders can use Visa, MasterCard, American Express, UnionPay, Diners Club and JCB cards, especially in the cities and in tourist areas, but merchants usually require a minimum purchase amount before they start accepting credit cards. Smaller merchants are usually cash-only. Credit cards are generally not accepted for government-related transactions, and in rural areas, credit card acceptance can range from limited to virtually non-existent.

Pay close attention when using ATMs, even when using ATMs on bank premises. While credit card fraud is uncommon in the Philippines, **ATM tampering** happens regularly. Obvious signs that an ATM has been tampered include loosely-installed keypads, larger-than-usual card slots, and wires or features that seem out of place.

Mobile payments

Mobile payments are rapidly becoming available in shops and restaurants in large cities and major tourist destinations. Two popular mobile payment services are the QR code-based **GCash** (<https://www.gcash.com>) and **Maya** (<https://www.maya.ph>), which are tied to telecom companies Globe and Smart, respectively. Both platforms are usable for paying at shops and restaurants, with generous cashback within a certain timeframe. For both, you can also elect to get a debit card linked to them to use in place of your phone for payment. You will only need a Philippine mobile number, an ID, and the specific app to use those platforms, and reloading funds for those is through machines in convenience stores, pawnshops and some sari-sari stores. If using those platforms with a prepaid phone, you can only use it with a registered prepaid SIM card, however, which limits its use for short-term travelers. In addition for use in purchases, it is possible to transfer funds to someone you know using those platforms and repaying them in lieu of cash.



GCash and Alipay accepted here

While NFC-based mobile payments such as **Apple Pay** and **Google Pay** are not officially supported in the Philippines, they are nonetheless accepted and credit card terminals do accept payments made with either service. Some shops and restaurants which see many mainland Chinese customers also take WeChat Pay and Alipay, which are QR-based. Establishments taking GCash can also be used by those with Alipay or foreign Alipay partner payment platforms such as AlipayHK (Hong Kong), Touch 'n Go (Malaysia) or TrueMove (Thailand).

Tipping

Tipping is not required in the Philippines, except when the customer wants to show appreciation for services rendered. However, tipping is becoming more common especially in service-oriented places like spas and salons. In some restaurants and hotels, a "Service Charge" (8–12%) is added in the bill when

issued (these are not part of the listed rates); thus, rendering additional tips optional on the customer's part. In taxis, it is common to add ~~₱20-50~~ on top of the fare.

Costs

Traveling in the Philippines is **cheap** (one of the least expensive places to visit in Asia and in the world.) For example a stay in a pension house, tourist inn or lodge can cost as little as ~~₱300~~ a night for a fan room or ~~₱500~~ a night for an air-conditioned room. A flight to Cebu from Manila and vice-versa will cost as little as ~~₱999~~, while one from Manila to Davao can cost as little as ~~₱1595~~. Transportation can cost as little as ~~₱10~~ for the first 4 km (2.5 mi) in a *jeepney*. Provincial bus fares are also cheap, even for a luxury bus.

Using the internet in an internet café ranges from ~~₱1~~ per 5 minutes (₱12 for an hour) on a *pisonet* to ~~₱20~~ per hour on larger establishments, depending on the Internet café's location. A can of Coke costs as little as ~~₱20~~ while a copy of the *International Herald Tribune* costs ~~₱70~~ and *The Economist* as little as ~~₱160~~. In most restaurants, there is 12% Value Added Tax (VAT) usually included in the unit price but the service charge is often excluded and computed separately (although the restaurant may opt to waive the service charge if the customer only requests take-away food).

Shopping

See also: *Shopping in the Philippines*

Living in the Philippines is cheap and shopping in the country is also cheap compared to elsewhere in southeast Asia.

The country has a lot of shopping malls, from large to small and from modern to traditional; consumerism is part of Filipino culture. The four largest mall operators in the country are SM, Robinson's, CityMall and Ayala with locations across the archipelago. Most malls are open from 10AM to 9PM; they open as early as 8AM and close as late as 11PM during Christmas shopping season (mid-September to early January). Many close every Christmas, New Year, and Good Friday, with a few exceptions. Due to terrorism risk, security is tight at malls, with lines for bag searches and metal detectors.

What's a *pasalubong*?

A *pasalubong* is a tradition practiced by Filipinos for a long time. It is something you bring to your friends and family as a souvenir, keepsake or gift from a place you have visited. A *Pasalubong* consists of food (usually delicacies and sweets), T-shirts, souvenirs such as key chains, bags, etc.

In major malls, department stores, supermarkets, and brand-name stores, the tag price normally includes value-added tax (VAT) and any applicable sales taxes. In bazaars and *tiangges* (markets), prices may be marked, but you can often bargain for a better price. It is common, especially for clothing, to get a better price if you buy two or more.

By law, all establishments are required to issue an official receipt. Please make sure to ask for this. Just like elsewhere, it will come in handy anyway if you run into problems with your purchase later (e.g. wrong product, defective goods).

Supermarkets and convenience stores

Supermarkets in the Philippines are dominated by four large chains, generally owned by Filipino-Chinese companies:

- SM Savemore & Walter Mart.
- Pure Gold & S & R & Lawson.
- Robinsons & Rustans (Marketplace) & Shopwise & Wellcome.
- Gaisano & Metro. There are now several separate companies with "Gaisano" in the name, run by different descendants of the founder of the original company.

Regional chains and mom-and-pop supermarkets, which may have lower prices than the four major chains, can be found as well, especially in less-developed areas of cities or in the countryside; see specific region or city pages for details.

Chain **convenience stores**, often tied with a major retailer, are common in urban areas. They generally have a wide variety of products, usually a subset of products sold in a grocery store, and fast food, and services like cell phone load, money transfer, courier service and bill payment. They mostly operate round the clock; the few exceptions are locations inside malls. Many of them do not take debit/credit cards but may accept mobile payments of a sort.



A typical sari-sari store

Traditional, **sari-sari stores** (small corner stores) are common, especially in the rural areas and villages. These are mostly family-owned stores usually found beside a road, and sell a selection of items that can be bought in grocery stores or general merchandise stores. Sari-sari stores also offer cell phone loading in addition to selling products.

Eat

See also: [Filipino cuisine](#)

Filipino cuisine is diverse, and varies by region and ethnic group. Local food varies as you travel between regions, provinces and islands, and ingredients vary by the local culture and economy, but there are broad characteristics that define Filipino food.

Filipino cuisine has developed from the different cultures that shaped its history; it is Southeast Asian cuisine but with influences from both Asia and the West. Though its cuisine is not as renowned as many of its neighbors, such as that of Thailand and Vietnam, Filipino cooking is nonetheless distinct in that it is possibly the least spicy of all Southeast Asian cuisines. Don't make the mistake of thinking that Filipino food is bland, though. It is just that instead of spices, Filipino food depends more on garlic, onions, ginger and vinegar to add flavor to dishes, and is mostly sweet, sour, and salty. Painstaking preparation and prolonged cooking time is also a characteristic of most Filipino dishes, and when done properly is often

what brings out the flavor of the food, as opposed to a healthy dose of spices. As with the rest of Southeast Asia, rice is the staple food of the Philippines, but parts of the country rather have corn instead. Nonetheless, non-Filipinos may be caught off-guard by the tendency for all meat to be cooked well-done.



Filipino cuisine

To experience how the Filipinos eat in a budget way, **carinderias** (eateries) and **turo-turo** (literally "point-point", buffet-style restaurants where you choose the food to be served to you) are some of the options. Mains cost less than ₱50. *Carinderias* serve food cooked earlier and it may not always be the safest of options.

You'll be hard pressed to find a mall without the requisite American **fast food** chains, which have their menus adapted to local tastes, but national chains such as **Jollibee** (hamburgers, fried chicken and spaghetti), **Greenwich** (pizza), and **Mang Inasal** (chicken barbecue) also capture the Filipino taste buds and are competitive. If you want even cheaper fast food, go to roadside burger shacks or the numerous food kiosks or stands in malls and public transportation terminals.

Filipino **street food** is one of the best however it may not be as clean as the ones you find in Singapore. Street food vendors have been criticized because of their unhygienic practices and unhealthy options but also praised for affordability and taste. Street food sold in malls, while often viewed as a show-off to appeal the refined tongue, is much safer and better.

Tropical fruits abound in the Philippines. Most of the countryside produce finds its way to the metro areas and can be easily bought in supermarkets or in the farmers' markets, which are considerably more colorful and often have better prices.

Meal patterns are basically similar to those in the Spanish-speaking world due to the country's history. Lunch is the most important meal, eaten between 11AM and 3PM, and a mid-morning or afternoon snack (*merienda*) is common.

Some Filipinos strictly use the *serving spoon* rule, believing that offering utensils or food that had come in contact with someone's saliva is rude, disgusting, and will cause food to get spoiled quickly. Singing or having an argument while eating is considered rude, as they believe food is grace; food won't come to you if you keep disrespecting it. Filipinos usually say a prayer before food is served, furthermore wait till the host invites you to start eating. Also, it is rude to refuse food that the host offers or leave the dining table while someone is still eating.

Dietary restrictions



Isaw (chicken intestine) and kwek-kwek (deep-fried, boiled duck egg battered in flour), popular street foods for many Filipinos

Vegetarians and **vegans** will find it difficult to find a Filipino dish which is wholly vegetarian as most Filipinos add meat in every single dish they eat. You can find some vegetarian restaurants in the Philippines, mostly lurking in the commercial, financial and provincial capitals, and most of them use tofu instead of meat. Nearly all towns have large markets with a fine selection of fruits and vegetables, mostly at good prices.

Muslims will find it hard to find Halal food outside predominantly Muslim areas in the Philippines. **Hindus** will find Indian restaurants which serve some vegetarian options in most of the larger cities. **Jews** will also find it hard to find Kosher meals. However rabbis in the Philippines can suggest some stores which sell Kosher food.

Awareness of food allergies or celiac disease is limited to non-existent.

Drink

See also: Filipino cuisine

Due to the tropical climate of the Philippines, chilled drinks are popular. Stands selling chilled drinks and shakes are common especially in shopping malls.

Filipinos (except for observant Muslims) love to drink (and get drunk). Filipinos rarely consume alcohol by itself. They would normally have what is called as *pulutan* or bar chow alongside their drinks which is like the equivalent of tapas. Beer is perhaps the most common form of alcohol consumed in bars.

Alcohol is cheap in the Philippines, some of the cheapest in the whole of Asia. In a supermarket the excellent local beers are around ₱35 and 750 ml (26 imp fl oz; 25 US fl oz) bottles of tolerable local rum or brandy start under ₱100. In many bars beer is around ₱60 and mixed drinks ₱90-150.

Sleep

Accommodation options range from luxury five-star hotels/resorts to backpacker inns, but off the beaten track, options are sparse. Rates begin at ₱200, or higher depending on location, season and demand. Large cities such as Manila or Cebu have a higher price bracket, so do major tourist destinations.

Homestays ("transient homes") or **bed and breakfasts** are common in the provinces, especially in tourist towns that do not have much commercial accommodation. Many are just basic homes that provide meals and lodging, but some may be mansions with a swimming pool.

Motels (or "short-time [hotels]") are another cheap option, but they have a reputation for being havens for illicit sex. They tend to be scattered in red-light districts, but many are clustered along major highways. Rates are *per hour* than *per day*, and it generally costs ₱600-1000 for overnight stays (at least 6 to 10 hours), or ₱200-400 for short stays (2 to 5 hours).

Hotels and **resorts** are usually for the higher-end traveler, although rates — even for four-star establishments — are not very high compared to other international destinations. **Condotels** are furnished condominium units rented out for long or short term stays, while **apartelles** are set up for both short and

long term stays. Pension houses, tourist inns and lodging houses are usually more basic and economical from ₱200 per night.

Cheaper places often have only fans instead of air conditioning, and no private toilet or shower. Even if you get a private shower, it may not have hot water, but this is not a big problem in a hot country. Bathtubs are rare in any accommodation, and the shower is often not separated from the toilet except in top-end hotels.

There are backpacker hostels all over the Philippines with dorm beds from ₱200.

The advertised hotel rates and services generally do not include 12% VAT and service charge (typically 8-10% of base price). These will be computed separately. Many smaller hotels will only accept cash for payment and do not accept online reservations and credit cards.

Learn

You must apply for a student (9F) visa if you study in a college or university in the Philippines, and those studying on an elementary, secondary, technical/vocational, or special school registered to allow foreign enrollment must apply for a **student permit** (along with other required documents if below 18 or required by the institution).

Tertiary education

Education is taken seriously in the Philippines, and studying is a good way to experience life in the country. Many foreigners such as Europeans, Chinese, Americans and Koreans go to university in the Philippines, partly because compared to other countries universities here are cheaper. The system is similar to the American system. The most prestigious institutions include University of the Philippines (<http://www.up.edu.ph>) (UP), De La Salle University (<http://www.dlsu.edu.ph>) (DLSU), Ateneo de Manila University (<http://www.admu.edu.ph>) (ADMU), University of Santo Tomas (<https://www.ust.edu.ph/>) (UST), Far Eastern University (<http://www.feu.edu.ph>) (FEU) and Adamson University (<http://www.adamson.edu.ph>). For American veterans, the VA will pay (<https://www.va.gov/education/about-gi-bill-benefits/how-to-use-benefits/study-at-foreign-schools/>) for courses at approved universities here.

Learning English

The Philippines is one of the largest centers for learning ESL (English as a Second Language) in Asia. Transport from Asian countries, living costs and tuition are all much lower than for the major English-speaking countries and the climate is pleasant.

There are many English learning centers around the country; many are in Metro Manila (especially Taguig City), Bacolod, and Cebu City, but there are some in all the major cities and in some of the resort areas. There are some jobs for foreign teachers in these places, though they mostly use Filipino teachers and generally will not offer high salaries to foreigners. See Teaching English.

Others

- **Scuba diving:** There is a great variety of dive sites and many have PADI-accredited diving schools where you can obtain your certifications. Costs (of both lessons and equipment) are

likely to be cheaper than even in Thailand and Malaysia. See Diving in the Philippines.

- **Martial arts:** *Eskrima* or *Kali* is a Filipino martial art that emphasizes using swords and sticks; it has been showcased in films such as *Equilibrium*. There are many training centers around Metro Manila and some almost anywhere in the country. Many other martial arts are also taught, but in any but a really large city only one or two will be available.
- **Filipino/Tagalog or regional languages:** Limited opportunities are available to seriously study Filipino or a regional language, as most Filipinos can readily read, speak and understand English (and jobs available to foreigners do not require Filipino language skills), but you can readily pick up any local language through lessons with locals, books, and online resources. Filipino is a mandatory subject in the Philippine education system, so you can be immersed in it while studying in the country.

Work

See also: Working abroad

Under Philippine law, any foreigner working must have an Alien Employment Permit issued by the Department of Labor. The paperwork is in general handled by the prospective employer and the employee picks up the relevant visa at a Philippine Embassy or Consulate. Working without a permit is not allowed, and doing so means you have no protection under labor laws. Furthermore, visas are checked upon departing the Philippines. Those who have overstayed without permission are subject to fines and, in certain cases, even jail.

It is possible for foreigners to earn casual money while staying in the Philippines, especially in Manila and other bigger cities in provinces. These may include temporary teaching in schools, colleges and other institutions, and working in bars and clubs. Temporary work may also be available as an extra on the set of a film or television series. Fluency in English is very important in jobs while knowledge of Filipino or Tagalog is not needed. The Philippines has overtaken India in the call center industry, and many international companies hire English fluent workers.

Most establishments pay monthly but informal jobs pay out variably either cash on hand or weekly.

Stay safe



WARNING: Travel to southwestern Mindanao (including the Sulu Archipelago, Bangsamoro, Soccksargen, and the Zamboanga Peninsula) is unsafe because of terrorism threats.

Government travel advisories

Australia (<https://smartraveller.gov.au/Countries/asia/south-east/Pages/philippines.aspx>) • Canada (<https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/philippines>) • Germany (<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/philippinensicherheit/212492>) • United States (<https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/traveladvisories/traveladvisories/philippines-travel-advisory.html>)

(Information last updated 09 Jan 2024)

Since the return to democracy, the Philippines suffers from crime, corruption, and ongoing insurgencies. While foreign governments and the media exaggerates the threats, the

The Philippine penal system

The legal system tends to be slow, and prison conditions are poor and dangerous. A falsely

country is, by and large, peaceful except for some regions experiencing low-level insurgencies. Crime levels in major cities are relatively comparable to those in American cities.

The country has one of those having the most deaths from natural disasters known to humankind: earthquakes, tropical cyclones (typhoons), floods, and tropical diseases.

The Philippines is quite low-income: unskilled jobs generally pay US\$100-200 a month and even many good jobs are under US\$500. More or less all travelers will be perceived as rich by local standards. This makes you a prime target for thieves, scammers, prostitutes and corrupt officials. Do not make it worse by displaying a Rolex, an iPhone and a Nikon or by pulling out a stack of ₱1000 notes when you pay a restaurant bill.

accused person could spend a long time in jail before being acquitted. **Bail is often denied**, especially for foreigners. Foreigners are sometimes given shorter sentences than those provided. For minor offenses, foreigners often serve only a few weeks before being deported. For serious crimes, however, a foreign citizen will be sentenced to a long term in jail, followed by deportation.

Law enforcement

Police

The **Philippine National Police** (PNP) is responsible for law enforcement for the country, and their officers are easily identifiable through their dark blue uniforms. Some officers would be wearing a light blue collared shirt (with PNP insignia on the chest) or T-shirt (with PULIS printed behind); this includes those stationed at tourist locations and smaller Police Community Precincts (PCPs). PNP's traffic law enforcement arm, the Highway Patrol Group (HPG), who patrols national highways and rural checkpoints, wear the same uniform as most police, but may be wearing a reflection vest. Police vehicles are generally white, with many variations by local division, but most should have the word PULIS or PULISYA at the front, and a white license plate with red text.

All police officers have nationwide authority. Many can speak English, but this depends on where you are in. Many are easily approachable, but some are not well-paid and therefore corrupt.

Hostage taking

There have been cases where tourists are specifically targeted and taken as hostage by insurgent groups or former police officers, with the most notorious incident being the Manila hostage crisis of 2010, where a group of Hong Kong tourists was taken hostage on a bus, and the police's botched rescue resulted in 8 hostage deaths. Always be vigilant of your surroundings and don't venture out alone after dark.

Traffic police

The PNP has a Highway Patrol Group (HPG), and many cities and municipalities have their own traffic police force that enforce traffic law at the local level. Traffic police are generally called *traffic enforcers* or *traffic aides*. Uniforms vary by municipality, but many wear a cap and pants with reflectorized strips,

and some don a vest for additional visibility. Many local traffic police forces have a bad reputation for being poorly trained and corrupt.

While its constituent cities have their own traffic police, Metro Manila has a region-wide traffic law enforcement authority, the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA), which has constables who patrols the major thoroughfares. MMDA constables wear a bright blue uniform, and are mostly courteous and trained. Most now serve roles in controlling traffic at major intersections and traffic bottlenecks, and only a few write tickets for traffic law violations. In addition, they also enforce regional ordinances against smoking, spitting, urinating in public, littering and jaywalking.



Traffic police officer in San Fernando, Pampanga

In some areas, the HPG will routinely setup road checkpoints. These are ostensibly to verify that you have the necessary documentation to operate your class of vehicle. In practice, the checkpoints primarily serve to facilitate searches of motorcycle saddlebags without warrants, if the HPG observes illicit goods in plain sight. You should slow down well in advance of the checkpoint and cooperate with officers, but do not be surprised if you are waved through if driving something on four wheels.

It varies hugely from place to place, but in some areas enforcement of traffic laws is quite lax; see Driving in the Philippines.

Private security

Private security guards are common, especially in malls, banks, transportation terminals, and government offices. They will be mostly dressed in a white or navy blue shirt and black pants, and are often armed with either pistols or shotguns. Female guards may have the same uniform as males, but some wear a black pencil skirt and hose. They may conduct bag searches, sometimes using a wand, or operate metal detectors, but these are almost always formalities and cursory glances. Some guards may have a black cap with badge. Most of them are friendly and approachable, but some are poorly trained, aggressive and corrupt.



A typical private security guard, assisting a vehicle leaving a parking spot.

Barangay *tanod*

In addition to police, barangays also have *tanod*, or village watchers, who are responsible for neighborhood policing. Most of them are unarmed, but some are armed with a *bolo*, a kind of machete, or with a staff. There is no standard uniform, but many wear a shirt with a vest, usually one bearing the barangay name, over it. *Tanods*, especially those in roadside outposts, will be happy to give directions should you get lost.

Crime

Crime, along with impunity and corruption within the police force, has increased since the return to democracy, and while the rate is relatively high by Western standards, they mostly happen within crowded or rough areas of large cities. Most common are pickpocketing, bag snatching, and hold-up robbery; flaunting high-denomination bills, designer bags, or personal gadgets puts you at risk for those. Beware of the *budol-budol* scam, where victims are hypnotized to follow the robbers' demands; it is common around Manila, but foreigners are rarely targeted. Getting involved in a crime might introduce you into the slow Filipino justice system.

Smash-and-grab theft on parked cars (the *basag-kotse* modus operandi) is common, even in guarded parking areas, so do not leave anything valuable inside the car, especially on the dashboard.

Distraction theft is uncommon, but they happen; such cases often involve dropping a coin (the *laglag-barya* scam), or intentionally sticking a piece of used chewing gum to a bus seat. In restaurants, one common scam involves staged beverage spills.

Bag-snatching by motorcycle riders, especially those riding in tandem, is common. Sometimes, they will pull the bag along with the person for a few meters. Be careful when carrying expensive bags, as it may catch the attention of snatchers. Avoid wearing jewelry, especially earrings or rings, when going into crowded areas.

Ethnic Chinese and visitors from China are often the target of **kidnapping** for ransom due to the stereotype that Chinese people are rich (many of the large Filipino companies are owned by ethnic Chinese). In some cases, the victims are killed after the ransom is paid. If you look Chinese, be extra vigilant, and avoid going to deserted areas at night.

Avoid getting into fights or confrontations with locals. Filipinos are generally smaller than Westerners, but being outnumbered by a group of three or even a mob is absolute trouble. Police, despite being able to communicate in English by and large, will not intervene on behalf of a foreigner in an altercation with locals. Getting into a fight with locals is a common cause for foreigners to be deported from the Philippines. Also **avoid raising your voice**; some simple arguments ended up with murder for causing the person to lose face and turn violent. Drunken locals can get violent and run amok, and bar fights are not uncommon, especially with East Asians. Filipinos are generally peace-loving people; showing *hiya* (saving face, literally "shame") and settling the issue diplomatically is better than getting into trouble.

Filipino organized crime syndicates are almost never a threat to the ordinary traveler, and mostly focus on drugs, human trafficking and contract killing. Entering a run-down neighborhood of a large city, you could be assaulted by thugs in unprovoked attacks, but this is generally unlikely unless you look like a Filipino.

Road travel

See also: *Driving in the Philippines*

Over 11,000 people die from traffic accidents in the Philippines every year, and many crashes involve **motorcycles and tricycles**, especially on rural highways. Reckless driving, poor road maintenance, lax traffic enforcement, limited usage of traffic cameras and radar guns, a mix of brand-new and dilapidated vehicles on the streets, red tape and corruption in the licensing and registration process, and lack of driver education all contribute to the dangerous driving environment. Crossing the street is risky as pedestrian

crossings are seldom followed. Driving at night is more dangerous as signs, markings, delineators, or lights are lacking, and some drivers do not lower their headlights. While the government has made attempts to improve the situation, manic speeders (*kaskasero*) and reckless drivers remain common. Driving is a dangerous experience for foreigners, but many get around without incident. Renting a car with driver is recommended but not necessary.



Traffic jam in Manila



Safety on provincial buses may not be up to international standards. Try to travel on reputable bus companies and avoid ordinary buses where possible. Ordinary buses are not only crowded and uncomfortable; the vehicle may be dilapidated and therefore unsafe for travel.

Beware of *unlicensed (colorum)* jeepneys, vans, taxis and tricycles. Licensed vehicles have yellow and black license plates, and standard operator info, and route/service area markings; *colorum* vehicles have private vehicle license plates (either black or green text on white background, or green text on blue sky background) and no additional marking. Legitimate vehicles running outside of their marked route or service area without a special permit are also considered *colorum*. Avoid riding one of them unless they're the only form of transport available, as they tend to be overloaded, drivers might charge higher fares, and passengers are not insured should they get involved in a crash.

Corruption

Corruption is a serious issue in the country, and the *kotong* ("bribe") culture, also helped by the meager wages of officials, widespread red tape, and patronage, is prevalent within the police and the Philippine bureaucracy. The situation is not as bad as back in the 1980s and 1990s, but some forms of corruption continue to persist.

Beware of immigration scams at Ninoy Aquino International Airport. Immigration officers might welcome you with a "Merry Christmas", even as early as August, and then ask you for "gifts" or a tip. More serious is the **hold-departure order scam**: a corrupt immigration official will tell you cannot leave the country because you were placed on an immigration blacklist for a crime you did not commit, and airport security will then come and hold you at their office until you bribe them. This rarely happens to foreigners, but might happen with returning Filipinos. Clarifying that a part of your name (especially the middle name) does not match those in the blacklist can help avoid this scam.

While not as bad as before, Philippine law enforcement is infamous for street-level corruption. Police officers or traffic police are known to extort bribes. Fines for minor infractions are very easy to get around, ranging from ~~₱300-500~~ ₱300-500, but cops may even ask for outrageous amounts, or threaten you to go to their station and talk with their superior. Police may even ask you for a bribe before filing a formal complaint, but this is no longer common. Have your phone camera ready so you have evidence against those who extort bribes; a dashcam is also a must if you are driving.

Philippine bureaucracy is also plagued with corruption. Acting polite, asking for a receipt, smiling and saying thank you will avoid any problems. Consider calling the civil service complaint hotline **8888** or writing a polite complaint letter if you run into trouble with the bureaucracy.

Carry your passport, or a photocopy of both the identification page and your visa at all times as random checks by police or immigration are not uncommon.

Begging

Begging for money (and handling of money to beggars) is illegal, but you may encounter lots of beggars in almost every medium to large city in the Philippines. Beggars range from street children, the homeless, and people soliciting on buses and jeepneys. Of particular note are the Sama-Bajau (or Badjao), a nomadic sea-going people from the Sulu islands which are ubiquitous in the port cities. They live in seaside fishing villages, but some of the poorer Badjao go further inland in big cities to beg for money.

Never give beggars money; giving them food is better, but some prefer money and will refuse food donations. Much better is to donate to a charity.

Female travelers

While women are respected in Filipino culture, crimes against women remain prevalent. Attitudes toward women remain conservative, and many Filipino men openly display machismo. While foreign women are rarely targeted for rape, there are chances you can get groped by strangers, harassed by male bystanders and robbed when traveling alone in a taxi.

While wearing short shorts, miniskirts, and other revealing clothes is fine in most parts of the country (except in the Muslim-majority regions), it makes you a target for opportunistic crime, and some places have outlawed wearing of any immodest apparel to combat rape and street harassment. A good rule of thumb is to observe Filipinas; in some areas they will be showing a lot of skin, but in others they will be covered. Foreign women need not go as far in either direction as the local lasses, but should go in the same direction.

Racism

Filipinos in general are tolerant and hospitable, and foreigners find it easy to blend in, but there is fairly some prejudice toward black people and mainland Chinese. Racism in the Philippines sometimes overlap with class discrimination, with light-skinned people being given preferential treatment in shops and employment. Travelers from sub-Saharan Africa are sometimes viewed with suspicion by police over concerns with West African drug trafficking rings. Anti-Chinese sentiment is high and mainland Chinese are increasingly met with suspicion, but violent attacks remain rare.

Homosexuality

Despite prevailing conservative mores, the Philippines is very tolerant to homosexuals and is the most LGBT-tolerant nation in Southeast Asia. Some cities, municipalities and provinces have passed ordinances protecting homosexual people, but a few places, like the Muslim-majority city of Marawi, have ordinances punishing homosexuality. LGBT people will be fine in the country, but you should not

be too indiscreet – a pair kissing in public may get stares or even verbal profanity. Country folk, Moros (Filipino Muslims), and the elderly are more conservative and will condemn it. Violence against gays and lesbians is rare.

Sex and prostitution

Many Filipinas eagerly seek out well-off men, both Filipino and foreign, as boyfriends or husbands. Foreign men are nearly all rich by local standards and will usually find themselves much more in demand than they would be at home.

Prostitution is illegal in the Philippines, but it is a thriving business. The country has several hundred thousand prostitutes. By no means all of those are professionals; a woman in a typical low-paid job can roughly double her income by sleeping with one or two guys a week, and some do just that on most weekends.

There are periodic crackdowns on prostitution, and penalties are harsh for those who are arrested—large fines, possibly prison, and likely deportation with a ban on returning to the country. Corrupt cops may target foreigners in order to extract large bribes, and prostitutes have been known to set up their customers for such schemes or to scam their customers in other ways. Also, as anywhere, sexually transmitted diseases are a large risk.

The commonest form of prostitution establishment is usually called a **girlie bar** or **bikini bar** in the Philippines, but similar places in Thailand are called **go-go bars** and some travelers use that term here. It is also fairly common to visit these clubs just to enjoy the show, a lot of scantily-clad dancers who compete to catch customers' eyes.

Human trafficking is a serious problem in the Philippines, many people including children are victims of human and sex trafficking. Sexual abusing children is strictly prohibited under Philippine law and the government takes a strong stand against this. Those who engage in child sex offenses abroad can also be held liable to criminal prosecution in their home country. For human trafficking, penalties range up to life imprisonment.

Drugs

The Philippines have a negative reputation for illegal drugs; its location along major drug smuggling routes between Asia and the Americas, along with less harsh penalties, has made the country a base for drug transshipment by international crime syndicates.

The most widely used drugs in the country are crystal methamphetamine (*shabu*) and marijuana (*damo* or *tsongki* in the local slang), and dealers selling them are common in the big cities. However, they are illegal and penalties are very harsh. Drug busts and sting operations are common, and you might well end up with a long prison sentence, followed by deportation. Possession of drug paraphernalia, such as glass or steel pipes ("tooters") used to administer shabu, could get you arrested. Bail is rarely granted for drug offenses, almost never for trafficking or for possession of shabu, so even people who eventually beat the charge are likely to spend months in jail. Also, since Duterte became president police and vigilantes have been shooting alleged shabu dealers without trial.

Methamphetamine (*shabu*) is a powerful stimulant and a remarkably nasty substance, best avoided for many reasons. An overdose may result in sudden death and long term use tends to burn out the body, especially the heart. As the song says, "Speed kills!" Moreover the stuff is highly addictive and changes the personality of heavy users, giving them a pronounced tendency toward paranoia and aggressiveness.

High-value party drugs like ecstasy (MDMA) and designer drugs like "fly high" are common in the nightlife scenes of large cities like Manila and Cebu. Rave parties are also hotspots for party drugs and spiked drinks. Police treat such drugs harshly, and using them can be fatal.

Natural disasters

The Philippines has many natural disaster-related deaths, second most in the world after China. Risks include typhoons, monsoon rains, floods, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

Monsoon rains and floods

Heavy rainfall — caused by local thunderstorms, typhoons or the monsoon winds — is part of the Philippine climate. The densely populated cities are not safe from the effects of rainfall and strong winds. In some flood-prone areas, local governments have placed flood detection systems to help in evacuation of areas in case a flood is expected. In any area, the best sources of information are local media, city or provincial governments and local residents.

The southwest monsoon (*habagat*) between late May and early October causes most heavy rainfall, and floods are common at times, especially when a typhoon strengthens it. The northeast monsoon (*amihan*) in January to March can also bring heavy rain. Many vehicles may become stuck in floods worsened by high tide and clogged drainage.

Even during the southwest monsoon, the sun may still shine most of the time, but be it may be wise to bring an umbrella, especially when cumulonimbus clouds are seen to form. Consider dual-purpose items; a hat or umbrella can protect against the tropical sun as well as against rain.

Typhoons

Typhoons are fairly common, usually coming in off the Pacific, sweeping across parts of the country, then heading on toward mainland Asia. Heavy rain and strong winds, usually occurring together, can cause great damage, and secondary effects such as storm surges on the coast or landslides in the mountains can also be serious. Typhoons typically cover a wide area, affecting entire islands or large regions.

A typhoon has two names in the Philippines, one assigned by an international weather-watching agency and another by the Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical, and Astronomical Services Administration (<http://bagong.pagasa.dost.gov.ph/>) or PAGASA.

For example, in 2013, the typhoon with strongest winds ever recorded at landfall, and the most destructive tropical storm in recent history, made landfall in Samar and devastated several other areas; it was known as "Typhoon Haiyan" internationally and "Typhoon Yolanda" in the Philippines.



Destruction in Tacloban after Typhoon Yolanda (Haiyan) in November 2013

Typhoons are a threat on land, but there are also risks at sea, where they can capsize a ship. Ships and ferries are not allowed to sail once Typhoon Warning Signal No. 2 is raised. When a typhoon is expected, err on the side of caution and cancel your trip.

Often flights are also cancelled because of high winds caused by typhoons. You may wish to schedule connecting flights a few days apart so that if your first flight is cancelled you can take a later one and still make your connection.

Tornadoes

The Philippines also has tornadoes (*ipo-ipo* or *buhawi*), though they are not as frequent and destructive as in the United States. One may form without early warning, especially out of a simple thunderstorm. Some are waterspouts, formed at sea. Most houses and buildings in the Philippines are made from concrete blocks, so severe damage is limited to peeled-off roofs, broken windows, and small debris. Makeshift structures are the most prone to damage, much like how they are very susceptible to typhoons.

Earthquakes and tsunamis

The Philippines lies in a geologically unstable area between the continental Eurasian Plate and the subducting Philippine Sea Plate, and is part of the Pacific Ring of Fire. There is a high chance for any part of the Philippines to be struck by earthquakes.

Earthquakes (*lindol*) are frequent, but most of them are weak and rarely perceptible, and a few can even trigger tsunamis (explained further below). The last major one happened on October 2013, when a magnitude 7.2 earthquake struck the island of Bohol, destroying homes, toppling centuries-old churches, killed over 200, and also damaged some structures in neighboring Cebu province. Many buildings and structures are not designed to standards or retrofitted to withstand powerful tremors, and makeshift or substandard construction remains a problem.

Earthquakes may occur anywhere in the Philippines, but the area with the highest risk is Metro Manila and Southern Luzon, where the **Valley Fault System** is present. The **West Valley Fault** may move anytime and cause a magnitude 7.2 earthquake (called the "Big One") that can cause about 100,000 deaths and injuries. Routine earthquake drills are being performed in the areas surrounding the fault to ensure people in those areas are prepared in case disaster strikes.

Tsunamis are a major risk in coastal areas. Though rare, be prepared to evacuate coastal areas once a tsunami is about to strike. Most coastal areas are tsunami-prone areas, especially those found near undersea trenches that can trigger such.

Volcanoes

See also: [Volcanoes#Philippines](#)

Volcanoes can be a danger in the Philippines, owing to its location in the Ring of Fire, and most areas are prone to volcanic eruptions. There are 50 volcanoes in the Philippines, and half of them are classified as active. The last high-profile eruption was Mount Pinatubo in 1991. It spewed out ash and lahar that affected millions in the surrounding provinces and caused a global drop in temperature. Mayon, in Albay,

noted for its perfect cone, is one of several active volcanoes that pose a danger with its frequent eruption. Taal Volcano in Batangas, the smallest volcano in the world, is also dangerous when signs of impending eruption shows on its caldera lake.

The most active volcanoes are also tourist destinations, and volcano safety rules apply when hiking or climbing those. When volcano warnings are raised, pay close attention to any scheduled trail closures and never attempt to go inside designated exclusion zones.



Mayon erupting in 2009



Dangerous animals

There are a few dangerous animals in the Philippines, but some common animal dangers are stray dogs, snakes, crocodiles and venomous reef fish.

Stray dogs are common across the Philippines, even in Manila and tourist areas. Most are quite passive, but they can carry rabies. Avoid feeding or petting them, and in the case they attack, do not run.

Venomous snakes, usually cobras, are present throughout the Philippines and often hide on trees and grass.

There is also some danger from crocodiles, especially the saltwater crocodile. The largest crocodile to be ever caught, Lolong, was involved in several fatal attacks on locals from fishing villages in Palawan.

Civil conflict

The Philippines has been struggling with insurgent groups such as Islamic separatists in Mindanao and Communists, under the New People's Army (NPA), throughout its history.

Non-essential travel to western Mindanao, which includes the Sulu Archipelago, Zamboanga Peninsula, and the mainland provinces of Bangsamoro, is discouraged as the security situation is far worse due to terrorism, piracy and Islamist insurgencies. While the situation has somewhat improved since the Marawi siege and the 2019 plebiscites, bombings and kidnappings continued to happen sporadically in 2020.

The rest of Mindanao remains safe, but some countries still have advisories discouraging travel to the rest of the region due to violent crime and terrorism, and travel insurance or consular assistance may be limited if you travel there. The sparsely populated region of Caraga (which has Siargao island) is far safer than the rest of mainland Mindanao, but the jungle also harbors Communist rebels and is also one of the poorest regions in the country.

Elsewhere in the country, Communist rebels, under the New People's Army (NPA) are a problem inland. They set up illegal checkpoints along rural roads and extort money from passing motorists, but they do not bother ordinary travelers, and are mostly targeting buses and cargo trucks.

Terrorism

Terrorist acts targeting tourist destinations are rare, but there have been several high-profile attacks, usually bombings, in the past, like the 2000 Rizal Day bombings, the 2004 SuperFerry bombing, the 2005 Valentine's Day bombings, and the 2016 Davao City night market bombing. Since then, there has been no major bombing, except for sporadic incidents within Mindanao. While security has been increasingly invasive in light of those incidents, with airport-style procedures when entering malls, public transportation terminals, and the like, there's no need to be paranoid.

Political unrest and protests

Demonstrations and protests are common, and often turn violent. Most rallies happen in Manila, particularly Mendiola St near Malacañang and Roxas Blvd near the U.S. Embassy. Avoid going into a place where a protest is being held. Philippine law also bars non-Filipinos from engaging in political activity; this includes joining protests.

Occasional **transportation strikes**, usually involving jeepney drivers, can disrupt business regionwide or even nationwide. In the cities, be prepared to walk, take a taxi or tricycle, or carpool to get to your destination. Buses are less affected by strikes, but will be in limited supply as they absorb passengers affected by the strikes.



A demonstration at Mendiola St, Manila

Election periods can be violent, especially in the less-visited provinces. There will be many police and military checkpoints along highways, and alcohol consumption is usually prohibited during the day of the elections.

Firearms

As an American colonial legacy, the Philippines has a strong **gun culture** and the most permissive gun ownership laws in Asia, but that does not mean you can carry any gun freely into the country for any purpose. The Philippines has strict gun laws, that you must obtain a license to possess one, and the process involves background checks, such as criminal history and mental capacity. A *permit to carry* is also required when bringing a handgun or pistol. All firearms must be declared to customs upon entry and exit. Carrying a gun is usually prohibited days before and after elections.

Stay healthy

Food and drink

See also: [water](#)

Drink the readily available **bottled water**. *Buko juice* (coconut water) is also safe if they have not added local ice to it. Be wary of *buko* juice vendors as some vendors create it out of tap water mixed with sugar. Buy and eat fruit that has not already been cut up. Cooked food from a *carinderia* (outdoor canteen) is okay if there is a fire under the pots and the food has been kept hot.

If you must drink **tap water** (it is usually served/contained in a small to medium plastic bag), water in Manila, Cebu City and other major cities is usually OK, but it is recommended that you boil tap water for at least 5 minutes just to be safe. Elsewhere drink bottled water. There is always the risk of contracting amoebiasis when drinking tap water in the countryside. Also, this applies to ice that is usually put in beverages, as ice sold on the street is often chopped off a block and transported under questionable conditions.

Bottled water is best purchased from within stores and sheltered eateries. Bottled water sold by vendors by the roadside and on buses is more than likely used bottles filled with tap water, sealed then cooled.

Street food isn't so safe to consume in the Philippines, and hygienic standards are poorly enforced. It is better to eat street food as well as *pampalamig* sold in food courts in malls, where hygienic standards are better enforced.

Diseases

The U.S. CDC (<http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/philippines.aspx>) advises that a risk of **malaria** exists only in non-urban areas below 600 meters on the islands of Luzon, Mindanao, Mindoro and Palawan. The Visayas are free of Malaria. Chloroquine is no longer a recommended malaria preventative for anywhere in the Philippines due to strains resistant to this drug. In general malaria is not common in the Philippines compared to Africa and the rest of Southeast Asia, and around half of annual cases are in a couple of discrete locations.

Dengue fever is common in the Philippines and cases increase every year, so it is advisable to apply mosquito repellants and wear long-sleeved clothes whenever possible. The only vaccine available, Dengvaxia, has been banned because of purported risks to children, but has been made available again in 2019 for those already exposed to the disease.

Measles was uncommon until a major outbreak occurred in early 2019. Getting vaccinated for measles is recommended.

Rabies is also common among street animals in the Philippines, so get a vaccination for rabies if you haven't already, and if you're traveling with children, vaccinate them as soon as possible as they are of high risk of getting rabies



Street food is widely available, though you should be careful with what you eat

Deadly wind?

Not all Filipinos, especially those in the countryside, have accepted the germ theory of disease; some people will instead explain the transmission of flu-like diseases by exposure to the weather. Some country dwellers explain deaths from the flu or flu-like disease from getting drenched in rain during the wet season or being exposed to the cold breeze during the cool season. Preventive measures include completely closing the windows when sleeping in rural homes or taking an overnight trip in an ordinary bus. Common cures are rubbing menthol or other herbal oils, *hilot* (therapeutic massage), or farting.

because they tend to play more with animals. Pets are required to be vaccinated against rabies before being brought into the country

Hepatitis A, B and C is endemic and common in the country. There are vaccines for hepatitis A and B, recommended for all travelers; there is not yet (mid-2015) a vaccine against C. Avoid contact with other people's blood and bodily fluids; sharing needles or even personal care items like razors or toothbrushes facilitates transmission for both hepatitis B and C. Hepatitis A can be transmitted through contaminated street food.

Japanese encephalitis is common, and vaccination is recommended. Avoid swimming in fresh water areas where you will have high risks of getting **schistosomiasis** (unless they are chlorinated). **Leptospirosis** is often contracted from recreational water activities, such as kayaking, in contaminated water.

Tuberculosis is very common in the countryside, so try to avoid individuals who cough or look weak and be careful about staying too long in villages that may contain many contagious people.

The **flu** and **cold** season in the Philippines runs through the wet and cool seasons. There have been sporadic outbreaks of avian influenza (bird flu) and swine flu, but cooked chicken or pork should be generally safe to eat. Wearing a surgical mask in public is becoming normal in the Philippines even before the COVID-19 pandemic, not only to prevent infection but to protect oneself from air pollution in the streets.

Bring anti-diarrheal drugs with you, as unsanitary conditions present a high risk for traveler's diarrhea. Gatorade or other sport drinks might relieve you from fluid loss. Drink bottled water if unsure, and always wash your hands.

Healthcare

The quality of healthcare in the Philippines varies widely. While modern hospitals and clinics with well-trained doctors are certainly available in the major cities, the quality of healthcare often leaves much to be desired in smaller cities and rural areas. While Filipino citizens are covered by a universal government-funded health insurance scheme, this scheme is not available to foreigners, and hospitals will often require you to make payment upfront before they will commence treatment. The vast majority of Filipino doctors and nurses are able to speak English, with some having received their training in the U.S., so communication is generally not an issue for English-speaking foreigners.

Public hospitals in the major cities are usually of a decent standard, though they may not be as comfortable as what Western expatriates are used to back home. Private hospitals, on the other hand, provide excellent standards of care, though you will be paying a steep premium for their services.

In Tagalog areas, it is traditionally considered unhealthy to be sitting or standing behind an electric fan or air conditioner, or you'll be "drowned" (*lunod*) by the cool air, especially if you just broke a sweat. *Lunod* is similar to the Korean "fan death" or the Indonesian *angin duduk*; it may be prevented by not turning on any electric fan (or just lowering the fan speed to the lowest), setting the air conditioner's temperature to be warmer than the ambient temperature, or when in an air-conditioned bus, closing the air conditioner vents slightly or completely.

Nevertheless, they are still reasonably priced by Western standards, so most expatriates opt for private healthcare whenever possible.

Sexually transmitted diseases

The Philippines has one of the fastest growing number of **HIV** cases worldwide. Although national HIV prevalence has historically remained below 0.1% before 2010, there was a 411% increase in daily HIV incidence between 2012 to 2023, with doubts about if this number is significantly underreported.

Other **sexually transmitted diseases** are more common than HIV. There are social hygiene clinics (STD clinics) in most municipal health offices in the Philippines.

Cope

Electricity

See also: [Electrical systems](#)

The Philippines uses both the American ungrounded type A and grounded B plugs, as well as the type C Europlug. Voltage is at 230 V but at 60 Hz; some installations may also have 110 V in addition to 230 V. A mix of outlets are used, with type A/B/C outlets being common in new buildings but older installations may only allow type A/B. If coming from a 100-120 V country, check if your device can be used with the higher voltage. Plug adapters are available at electronics stores, hardware stores and convenience stores.

Power is available 24 hours a day in the majority of the country, but power outages ("brownouts") can happen unexpectedly due to weather or sudden power plant shutdowns/repairs during seasons of high demand. Mindanao, which used to rely mostly on hydropower, no longer experiences rolling blackouts ("rotating brownouts") during the dry season, but occasional transmission tower bombings in the wilder parts of the region can still cause one at any time. All-day availability of power in off-grid islands (e.g. Palawan) depends on where the power is sourced. If staying in a hotel, look for "No brownout" signs or ask reception if they have a generator.

Toilets and bathrooms

See also: [Toilets](#)

You will generally encounter Western sit-down toilet seats in the Philippines, but they may not have a flush unit, especially in the countryside. To flush the toilet, wash your buttocks or privates, or clean the floor, you might have to rely on a bucket of water and a dipper (*tabo*).

Cleanliness of restrooms (*comfort rooms*, or simply called *CR*) varies by place, but as a rule of thumb, those in malls and luxury hotels are the best, while those in the countryside tend to be terrible. Toilets in fast-food restaurants such as Jollibee, McDonald's and KFC, (or any of the major local restaurant or cafe chains) and public transportation terminals may not be as clean depending on location. Long-distance buses should have a toilet on board, but it can be difficult to stand when the vehicle is moving, and Chinese-made buses may have squat toilets instead of the ceramic thrones Filipinos are used to.

Toilet paper (or simply *tissue*) may be available, but you will usually throw them onto a trash can beside the seat instead on the bowl, as toilet paper can clog up small sewage pipes common in most Philippine homes. However, they may not be provided in public toilets, that you must buy packets from coin-operated vending machines, convenience stores, or drug stores.

Some households may provide slippers when going to the bathroom. Bathrooms in Philippine homes are often cramped and wet, and the shower is usually not separate from the toilet.

Religious services

Being a very religious nation, there is no shortage of places of worship in the Philippines. In most towns and cities, there should be at least one Catholic church (usually around the town hall and plaza) and numerous Protestant churches (usually Evangelical, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal and Methodist); there may also be mosques and a Chinese temple depending on the local demographics. In the barangays, there will be chapels dedicated to the local patron saint. Mormon churches and Kingdom Halls of Jehovah's Witnesses are ubiquitous even in backwater towns due to missionary activities. For people of other faiths (e.g. Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs), options are limited and tend to be within large cities only.

Media

Television and video

Television and video in the Philippines uses NTSC (the American standard). The transition to digital broadcasting will bring the Japanese ISDB standard in by the end of 2024. Region-coded DVDs are Region 3 (Southeast Asia), though virtually all Filipino movies are region-free. DVDs sold can be found in major shopping malls, but counterfeit DVDs with no region coding remain common, especially in *tiangges*, and should be avoided.

Television stations usually broadcast in local languages, and generally have a news broadcast every early evening. As of 2020, only GMA and TV5 are the two major local free-to-air TV stations, after ABS-CBN has been shut down after a licensing controversy (though they produce content for other channels since late-2020). There are also a few English-language free-to-air channels such as RJTV. News-oriented TV channels include onePH and SMNI and other "teleradyo" channels (video simulcasts of AM radio stations), but are broadcast in Tagalog or regional languages. 24-hour TV channels are rare; most sign off every midnight till 6AM, and during Holy Week, local TV channels have very different programming, usually broadcasting reruns of *telenovelas* and airing live religious services, like the "seven last words" (*siete palabras*) during Good Friday.

Radio

Radio is popular in the Philippines, and much widespread than television, with thousands of radio stations in the both the AM and FM bands. Most stations broadcast in Tagalog and/or regional languages, but there are some English-language stations as well, usually in Manila and tourist areas. AM is predominantly used for news and talk stations, and FM predominantly for broadcast music, but several news radio networks have established themselves in the FM band. Again, most of those networks only broadcast in Tagalog and regional languages. Some stations are also available as online streams.

Shortwave radio is also available, notably Voice of America (VoA) and BBC World Service. A BBC World Service newscast (every 6AM and 8PM) is also available through DZRJ 810 AM (in Manila).

Newspapers

English newspapers are available throughout the Philippines and there are also some Japanese- and Chinese-language options. The Philippines's newspaper of record is *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (<http://www.inquirer.net/>), published daily. Other major English-language newspapers are *Malaya* (<http://www.malaya.com.ph>), *Manila Standard* (<https://www.manilastandard.net/>), *Manila Bulletin* (<http://www.mb.com.ph/>), *Business World* (<https://www.bworldonline.com/>), *Philippine Star* (<http://www.philstar.com/>); all of those are broadsheets.

Tabloid newspapers are mostly local-language ones, usually Tagalog/Filipino (but may be another local language in regional tabloids), but a few are published in English, such as *People's Journal* and *People's Journal Tonight* (the latter, however, has some news written in Tagalog).

Smoking

Smoking is a common Filipino pastime, and is often coupled with small talk and drinking sessions. About 25% of Filipinos smoke.

Cigarettes (*sigarilyo*, or colloquially, *yosi*) in the Philippines are cheap. For example, Marlboro are about ₱80 for a pack of twenty in a supermarket, ₱100 in a bar or a convenience store as of early 2018. Local brands are cheaper (often ₱50-60) and cigars are available as well. However, higher taxes on cigarettes and other tobacco products are gradually making them more expensive. Many sari-sari stores also sell cigarettes by the stick, usually for ₱4.

It is common for Filipinos to smoke while walking and for groups of people to stand on a corner and smoke, but there are strict smoking bans, with varying degrees of enforcement. Smoking is prohibited in indoor public places, public transport, restaurants, gas stations, and even in bars, except for smoking areas. Smoking in places where smoking is prohibited or in a non-smoking area may bring a fine of up to ₱5,000, but this is somewhat laxly enforced.

The smoking and vaping age is 18. Convenience stores and e-cigarette stores require customers to provide photo ID, but *sari-sari* stores usually allow children and youth to buy cigarettes. In some places, such as in Metro Manila, authorities may prohibit a store from selling cigarettes because of nearness to a no-smoking zone, and such stores have posters pasted in the storefront, usually saying *Ang tindahang ito ay bawal magtinda ng sigarilyo* ("This store is prohibited from selling cigarettes.").

Streets are commonly littered with cigarette butts. Many garbage cans do not have ashtrays or butt trays, so you may be tempted to throw them on the sidewalk, the street, or on grass, which may present a fire hazard. Find a trash can marked to allow cigarette butts or bring a portable ashtray when smoking outside.



No smoking?



Smoking bans are imposed on several cities and municipalities, like in Davao City, where it is completely banned. Yet, enforcement of smoking bans varies. A nationwide smoking ban came into effect in May 2017, further restricting where people are able to smoke. Even smoking in sidewalks are being banned, and designated smoking areas are required to be an enclosed, ventilated, area. Despite the new regulation, open-air smoking areas and smoking on sidewalks are still prevalent.

In November 2019, a nationwide **vaping ban** has been in effect; smoking bans may also be extended to vaping.

Embassies and consulates

Many nations have embassies in Metro Manila and some have consulates in Metro Cebu or Davao as well.

Plastics

It is encouraged to bring a reusable bag when shopping.

Funds transfer

Pawnshops are common in every city and town, but they are used more for funds transfer than for pawning or buying items. Both they and the numerous **Western Union** offices handle transfers both from overseas and within the country. Foreigners should beware of scammers who request a money transfer.

Respect

Filipinos are hospitable, friendly and polite, but cultural norms differ drastically from much of the West. Much of Filipino etiquette borrows from East Asian and Hispanic culture.

- Filipinos are in general indirect communicators, mostly motivated by **hiya** (hee-YUH', "shame"), or saving face. They will try their best to avoid saying anything that can be negative or judgmental. With close circles however, communication is direct.
- Filipinos have a relaxed view of time, like Hispanics. Approach "**Filipino time**" with patience; being "fashionably late" is also not uncommon especially in social events. Buses and ferries often do not observe timetables. This does not extend to business or formal meetings.
- Filipinos respect their **elders**, and it is considered rude to challenge someone older than you has said. Use the correct pronouns or term of address when addressing an elderly person or anyone older than you. There are also honorific particles in some of the Philippine languages, such as Tagalog *po* and Bikol *tabi*; use them when talking with anyone older. On buses, jeepneys and trains, priority seats are

Filipino naming customs

- Most Filipinos names generally observe Western first-middle-last naming order, but middle names refer to the mother's surname or a maiden name rather than a secondary first name, a relic of the Spanish naming customs Filipinos have adopted. If filling forms, it is safe to include your middle name to the first name field (Filipino bureaucracy usually treat such as part of the first name at least) or go with just your first name.
 - Muslim Filipinos (Moros) follow the same naming order as most Filipinos, but their surnames will either be the name of their father or the name of their clan. Moros outside of nobility and their patrons generally

provided for use by the elderly, as well as pregnant women and people with disabilities. It is considered honorable to help an elderly person cross a street.

- It is generally fine to be asked overly personal questions, with the exceptions on money or personal achievements. This may strike brash and too direct for foreigners, but this is just a way for Filipinos to get to know someone. If you are not fine with such questions, simply give them an indirect answer.
- Filipinos generally value their families, with most Filipinos living in extended families at multigenerational homes. Filipino children usually remain at their parent's home even after passing 18 years old, and it is customary to head for the provinces during major holidays to reunite with one's extended family. Making negative comments about someone's family may not win you any friends.
- Tread very carefully if you have Filipino roots, if you were born and raised overseas, or if you are in an intimate relationship with a Filipino/Filipina: You're often expected to align your views with your/their family, and not doing so would result in you being shunned.
- With the possible exception of Moros, most Filipinos display a strong culture of **male courtesy to women** and **machismo**, an influence from Hispanic culture. It is considered polite to men to give up a seat to women on a bus or train. More or less overt shows of male dominance in families, while becoming less common, can be rather jarring. It is impolite to use strong language or speak loudly toward women.
- Filipinos take religion seriously, and are also superstitious. Many Filipinos believe in spirits, mythological creatures and luck, and practice ancestor worship. Religious celebrations and rituals form a major part of Filipino life.

had no heritable surname until the modern era.

- **Nicknames** are variable and can change by context. They can be just be pet forms or initials, or have no relation to the person's name at all.
- **Terms of address:** You must address anyone older you don't know well with *tito* (uncle) or *tita* (auntie) in Filipino, or *sir* or *ma'am* in English. If addressing someone of the same age or status, use *kuya* (older brother) or *ate* (older sister). In formal settings, the ways of address is Mr./Mrs./Ms. plus full name or last name (Ginoo/Ginang/Binibini plus full name or last name in Filipino).
- Occupations are often used as formal titles (e.g. Architect, Engineer, Professor, Doctor, Attorney). This may strike unusual to most other English speakers, yet, "Professor" and "Doctor" are more common in overseas usage.
- Address people by their first name or nickname only if you know them well or are older or higher in position. Calling someone you don't know well with their first name is considered rude for Filipinos.

Things to do

- Smile and greet people as you go around. Always say "thank you" or *salamat* when receiving something.
- **Take off your shoes** when entering homes, unless your hosts say otherwise. They may also provide you slippers, which are especially useful in the bathroom.
- Share food with people you're close to. This is expected in meetings.
- Learn Tagalog or any other local language. It is possible to get around the Philippines just speaking English, but not everyone speaks good English. Filipinos will appreciate your attempts to speak their languages and will try to correct your mistakes.
- **Obey Philippine laws.** You may have Filipino scoff-laws and corruption on the top of your mind, but don't forget you're in a foreign country and you'll just be putting yourself in trouble

and create a negative impression for Filipinos.

Things to avoid

- **Avoid shouting, raising your voice, or losing your cool.** This can be taken as rude. For the Visayans, it's just okay to raise your voice.
- Unless you are in a position of authority, avoid pointing out someone's mistakes in front of everybody. Also do not be harsh when given negative feedback. Filipinos consider it a loss of face to be beckoned, and will try to defend themselves. If you want to point out something, better do it in private. Settle disputes diplomatically.
- Avoid talking about money or family. Filipinos consider these things as private affairs.
- Avoid bragging about your personal achievements. Filipinos generally do not take them well.
- Avoid **making out**. Except in big cities, passionate kissing and hugging are considered scandalous behavior to Filipinos unless done in private. You may be met with angry stares and it's possible to get arrested for this. In short, don't offend Filipino sensitivities by kissing and hugging in public. **Holding hands**, on the other hand, is acceptable; many Filipino couples do this openly.

Political issues

Filipinos are an openly political people. There is a wide variety of political views among Filipinos, and it's common to criticize and show discontent about the government. You can talk freely about politics, but this can also place you on someone's negative side.

- Be careful if discussing anything about the **Ferdinand Marcos** presidency. This is a painful and also polarizing period in Philippine history; you might meet Filipinos who will share stories of relatives who were tortured, disappeared, murdered or have gone to exile during martial law, but you might also encounter Filipinos who support his government, long for the era's relative prosperity, stability and order, and even downplay or deny stories of abuses and corruption. Given the strong regional loyalties in Filipino politics, the Marcos family continues to enjoy strong support in their home region of Ilocos Norte. Never assume Filipinos have the same view about Marcos.
- Also tread carefully if discussing **Rodrigo Duterte's war on drugs**, as many Filipinos have strong feelings, especially on foreign views, particularly on the alleged extrajudicial killings done by police and imprisonment of opposition figures such as Leila de Lima. The Duterte administration enjoys strong support from Filipinos; saying Duterte is an iron-fisted strongman oversimplifies things. There has been an international investigation into the War on Drugs, which the victims' families openly welcomed.
- **The Spratly Islands territorial dispute** is also a sensitive issue among Filipinos. Tensions boil over periodically over territorial disputes in the South China Sea, called the "West Philippine Sea" in the Philippines — using the former may offend locals by suggesting that you support China's claims. Possession of maps showing the nine-dash line is likely to elicit negative reactions from Filipinos; this has also resulted in certain foreign movies and television series such as the 2019 animated film *Abominable* being banned in the Philippines.
 - **Philippines—China relations** are a sensitive issue, and **anti-China sentiment** is high. That said, this resentment generally does not affect Chinese Filipinos and the Taiwanese, and unprovoked harassment of individual tourists from China remains rare. Also, China had become the country's main source of imports and tourists, second only to the United States.

- There is also a strong feeling of **Filipino pride**, given the success of overseas Filipinos and the many achievements of Filipinos at home and overseas. Filipinos sometimes tend toward self-deprecation: you might encounter this if a Filipino brings up something they consider to be "only in the Philippines". If you are of Filipino ancestry or are born abroad and raised overseas, tread carefully. Negative feedback about the culture or the country will not be treated lightly.
- Filipinos show strong loyalties to their ethnic groups, provinces, cities and towns, and relations between Manila and the provinces may not always be warm. You should avoid condensing the Philippines into just Manila and its surrounding provinces or the Tagalog people, or assuming Filipinos behave as like those in Manila. Provincial Filipinos, especially non-Tagalogs find it insulting, as if they are economically, culturally and politically subordinate to "Imperial Manila".
 - Tagalog as the national language Filipino can be a mildly sensitive subject in non-Tagalog provinces, especially Cebu. While most Filipinos can speak Tagalog as a second language alongside English, some non-Tagalog Filipinos such as Cebuanos will answer back anything said in Tagalog in the regional language (e.g. Cebuano) or English, usually as a political statement in defense of their mother tongue. At worse, you might be shouted at or be refused service in places like taxis.
 - Igorots (the indigenous people of the Luzon Cordilleras) and Moros (Muslim Filipinos) consider themselves as separate nations from most Filipinos. While there are no longer an active separatist movement in the Cordilleras, the Igorots still have calls for increased autonomy to better control of resources and protection of their culture. Moros have fiercely fought the Spaniards and the Americans, and emphasize their links to Islam, their distinct cultures and shared history.
- Most Filipinos **do not identify as Hispanic**. Despite being a Spanish colony for over three centuries and adopting aspects of Spanish culture (including religion, naming customs and food), Filipinos hardly identify with the Hispanic cultural sphere, and Spanish (aside from creole forms) is no longer commonly spoken by Filipinos. Applying common Hispanic stereotypes to Filipinos will likely to be taken with bewilderment. Many Filipinos resent being part of the Spanish Empire for its excesses, but this does not extend to Spaniards or Spanish culture.
- In contrast to Spanish colonial rule, Filipinos generally have a positive view of American colonial rule and bear no animosity against the United States whatsoever. Most Filipinos admire American culture, have relatives living in the U.S., and are grateful to the U.S. for backing them militarily and diplomatically in their territorial disputes with China.
- **Antisemitism** is hardly a problem in the Philippines, with most Filipinos having a positive view of Israel, especially in regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Back during the pre-WWII years, the Philippines (then a U.S. Commonwealth territory) welcomed 10,000 Jewish refugees escaping the Holocaust in Europe. However, Moros are strongly supportive of Palestine and some may be openly antisemitic.

Dress

By and large, Filipinos are a conservative people, and personal appearance influences how you will be treated by people around you. Filipino women are generally more modest, though that depends on location.

Modest clothing is advised especially outside touristy areas, and a few places may have local laws discouraging immodest dress. Except in churches, religious sites, government offices, and other places with written dress codes, Western casual wear is okay anywhere in the country. For women, short shorts and miniskirts are fine, but it is more respectful to wear skirts, pants, or shorts that cover at least the knee.

Sleeveless shirts (*sando*) or basketball jerseys are okay anywhere, but not in a church or office. Crop tops or low-cut tops are uncommon, and will make you stand out. You may also be turned away if you are wearing ripped jeans.

In the Muslim-majority provinces of the country, more modest dress is advised. Men are advised to wear pants and long-sleeved tops. Muslim Filipino women usually wear the hijab (often the *tudung* commonly worn in Malaysia and Indonesia), but this is not required for visitors.

Business attire: For men, a long-sleeved collared shirt or suit is standard, though ties are often omitted, the collar button is usually not closed, and it's also possible to wear a semi-formal *barong tagalog* called *polo barong* instead. Women generally wear Western office attire.

In universities and colleges, there is usually a dress code for students and visitors, especially in the private and religious ones. Many programs may require you to wear a uniform. A student ID may be required to enter campus grounds and prominently visible at all times. In the University of the Philippines campuses, dress is fairly more liberal however.

Beachwear in the Philippines is conservative. Swimming trunks (for men) and swimsuits (for women) are standard, but bikinis are uncommon with Filipinas. Swimming with your top on is common, generally as a way to avoid sunburn, but this may not be allowed depending on pool rules.

Being topless or half-naked in public is illegal, and often associated with criminal behavior. Full nudity is also disapproved of and illegal in general, unless you're in a remote beach. Breastfeeding in public is legal, but uncommon with Filipinos.

Eating and drinking

Main article: [Filipino cuisine#Respect](#)

Some general Filipino dining etiquette:

- Never use the left hand when eating by hand or handling spoons, cups or glasses. Filipinos generally consider the left hand unclean (this is what they use to clean their privates).
- Use serving spoons when taking food from shared dishes to your plate. It is considered disgusting to use your spoon to scoop up food to your plate.
- It is considered impolite to refuse food given to you, as Filipinos consider food grace (*grasya*). For the same reason, it is also considered impolite to not finish eating your food or argue around the dining table.

Tipping is generally not practiced in restaurants, but there will be usually a service charge on top of the bill. The oldest or most senior person in a group is generally expected to pay the bill.

Religion

You are unlikely to offend Filipinos if you talk about your religion, but you should not impose your religious views onto someone. This is considered proselytism and is strongly frowned upon in the Philippines. In the Muslim-majority region of Bangsamoro, attempts to proselytize Muslims, while not illegal under national law, will be met with resistance and worse, threats of violence, especially from extremist groups.

Interfering with religious ceremonies and making negative remarks about a religion in any place of worship are criminal offenses in the Philippines. The Philippines is officially secular, but it's not a place to insult another religion in public. In 2010, a Filipino Spanish tour guide and activist, Carlos Celdrán was arrested and fined for interrupting Mass in Manila's San Agustín Church.

It is not unusual for Christian prayers to happen in otherwise secular spaces. Some ferry companies include a prayer as part of their safety demonstration. Malls may conduct prayers on their PA system and offer large chapels for prayer and contemplation. Movie theatres and sporting events may start with a prayer.

Irreligion is not taboo. There is a tiny (0.02%) minority of agnostic and atheist Filipinos, but being one is strongly stigmatized in the Philippines. Saying you are one or anything similar to a Filipino may end up with a long debate and attempts to proselytize.

Filipinos take many superstitions and associated taboos seriously, especially in regards to spirits, luck, and mythological creatures; belief in Chinese superstitions is also widespread. Some superstitions specific to Filipino culture are:

- **Eating chicken during New Year** - A taboo by the Chinese, you should not eat chicken during New Year, both the Gregorian and Chinese one; it is considered bad luck.
- **Haunted trees:** Many people believe large trees, like banyans (*balete*) are inhabited by *kapre* (cigar-smoking giants); you can be haunted if you approach them without asking their permission.
- **Nuno** (goblins): It is polite to say *tabi po nuno* when passing near locations where *nuno* (a kind of goblin) live; not doing so can cause sudden manifestation of unexplained illness.
- **Usog:** A greeting from a stranger can bring unexplainable convulsions and fever, especially to a child; the curse is warded off by rubbing saliva on the child's abdomen.
- **Wedding gowns:** A taboo by Hokkien Chinese, the wife should not wear her gown a day before the wedding, or it will not happen.

Animal ethics and the environment

The Philippines has a thriving black market selling endangered species as pets or luxury souvenirs, and there are frequent raids on shops selling products from endangered species. Avoid buying rare pets, leather, feathers, dried sea creatures like starfish, fur and other products likely from illegal poachers. Customs take laws on endangered species seriously, and they may be confiscated at the airport.

Dog meat, especially *asusena* (a portmanteau of Tagalog *aso* and Spanish *azucena*) is best avoided for most reasons; you can find dog meat at restaurants in Benguet as traditional food by the Igorot people, but avoid it elsewhere. Slaughtered dogs may carry the deadly rabies virus, and can be a nasty experience if you get hospitalized.

It is also wise to avoid photo booths with animals, like snakes, as subjects, even in zoos. A tout will approach you, you pose for a photo with the animal, and you then pay an exorbitant fee. It is most likely that the animal used is drugged and treated cruelly.

Others

- **Personal space** is paid less attention in the Philippines. Buses, jeepneys, and trains become crowded, and shoving and pushing without saying *excuse me* is common. The mad dash to get onto a bus, jeepney or train during rush hour has become common.
- Some English words related to race or ethnicity that will sound racist back home may carry little or no negative connotation among Filipinos. *Negro/a* (pronounced the Spanish way) is still commonly used toward black people (with racist connotations), while people of mixed race are still called *half-breed* in English. *Biracial*, *biethnic* and *half-blooded* has also become common. Similar terms in Philippine languages may sound affectionate depending on context. White people are called *puti* (poo-TEH'), but some may even call them *American*, *Amerikano/a* or the mildly stereotypical *Kano/a* (kuh-NAW') regardless of nationality.
- The Philippines is the most LGBT-tolerant nation in Asia according to a Pew poll and Filipinos are known to be hospitable toward gays. LGBT travelers are safe in the country, but they should not be too indiscreet: a pair displaying affection in public can stir locals, mostly involving verbal profanity. Cases of homophobic violence or gay bashing are rare, but do happen, especially on conservative families.
- **Class discrimination** is common in Filipino culture. Foreigners or returning Filipinos from overseas are often perceived as rich.
- At certain times, the **national anthem** is played on public announcement systems in public locations like malls and cinemas (before any film starts, as in a few Asian countries including Thailand), and everyone is required to rise and place their right hand on the left side of their chest or stand with their hands at their sides. You should do the same if you hold Philippine citizenship, lest you can get arrested and fined. Foreign nationals, including those of Filipino descent, may just stand at attention respectfully.

Culture shock

Traveling outside the usual tourist destinations or big cities, or staying in the country for long, foreigners may find some aspects of Filipino life rather jarring and begin thinking Filipinos are rather rude and the flow of Filipino life is going against them. This actually ends up with foreigners being rather rude. This is due to culture shock: some aspects of Filipino customs and values are radically different from Western culture. Filipinos are a welcoming and easy-going people, but they are not necessarily polite. That said, well-educated Filipinos will generally behave more similarly to people in the West.

- Filipinos **ignore or disobey rules** they don't agree with, including laws. Here, the *pasaway* character comes to play. This includes aggressive driving, frequent smoking, and jaywalking.
- Filipinos also **spit** a lot, especially in the streets, and spitting with gulping noises in public restrooms is common. Filipinos believe that swallowing phlegm is unhealthy. While local governments are striving to curb down the habit to curb the spread of disease, it still persists to some degree in most places.
- It is just fine to pick your nose or use toothpicks at the dining table. Filipinos don't like having dried mucus hanging from the nose or have small food particles trapped between their teeth appear on their smiles.

- You might notice on your first arrival that many places in the Philippines are **noisy**, with loud conversations, blaring horns, constant construction, and ubiquitous megaphones and loudspeakers, from churches and storefronts to malls. In some regions, speaking loudly in a tone that can be taken for anger is normal. The ears of Filipinos have mostly adapted to the noise, so it's advisable you bring earphones or earplugs on trips.
- There is some tolerance toward **running amok**, even when it ends up as the murderous *pagdidilim ng paningin*. Some believe running amok is a way for men to escape *hiya*, especially when one loses a drunken fight.
- The concept of **queueing/waiting in line** (pila) introduced by the Japanese is not fully observed in the Philippines. Sometimes, it takes courage to be assertive, and make your way through lines, such as when taking public transit. However, it has been objected to, even in rural areas.
- Filipinos, especially if in groups, also love to use elevators whenever possible, especially at malls. Provide extra time for this if you're going around on a wheelchair, or pushing a stroller.
- Except in the large cities and tourist areas, foreigners are mostly an uncommon sight in most of the Philippines. Expect Filipinos to approach you to practice their English and ask questions about your home origin, your reason for being in the Philippines, and plans to return home; just answer them honestly. It is also not uncommon for Filipinos to just grab out their camera and take a picture of you especially if you are white.



No smoking please.

Connect

Phone

- **Nationwide emergency hotline: 911** (formerly **117**) by voice or text message. These calls are automatically routed to the nearest emergency call center.
- **Philippine Coast Guard Action Center:** +63 2 527-3880
- **National Poison Control:** +63 2 524-1078
- **Tourist hotline:** +63 2 524-1728 and 524-1660
- **Directory assistance:** 187 or 114 (fee applies)
- **Civil service complaint hotline:** 8888

The international dialling prefix to make an overseas call from the Philippines is **00**.

Phone numbers in the Philippines have the format +63 35 539-0605. The country code for the Philippines is **63**. The next one, two or three digits are the area code, and the remaining 7 digits are the "local" part of the number that can be called from within that area without dialing the area code. You must dial "0" in front of the area code from outside that area code when still within the Philippines.

Most toll-free numbers cannot be called from outside the Philippines but can be dialed using the format 1800-1855-0165 domestically.

The cheapest way to call to and from the Philippines is by using Internet telephony (VoIP). There are several licensed VoIP providers in the Philippines. One of the most popular is Vodini Telecom (<http://www.vodini.com/>).

Cell phones

Mobile numbers in the Philippines must always be dialed with all 11 digits (including a "0" prefixing the "8nn" or "9nn" within the Philippines), no matter where they are being called from. They can also be called within or outside the Philippines using the international format as listed in our Philippines articles

There are two major companies operating GSM 900/1800 networks: Globe (<http://www.globe.com.ph/>) and Smart (<http://smart.com.ph/>). A third provider, Dito Telecom, is also emerging. Your provider at home may have agreements with one of these providers so check with them before leaving home. Roaming may be quite expensive, but pre-paid SIM cards of these networks are easy to acquire and cost as little as ~~₱30~~ and provide a cheaper alternative. If your unit is locked to your home service provider, cellphone repair shops in malls can unlock them for ~~₱300~~ to ~~₱2000~~. A complete prepaid kit with phone and SIM can be purchased for as little as ~~₱500~~. These phones are usually locked to a local network provider, and you would have to have it unlocked before leaving to use it elsewhere.

A mandatory prepaid SIM card registration law came into effect in December 2022. Upon buying a prepaid SIM, you must register it online, and provide photos and valid identification (such as your passport). Vendors may ask you for these if purchasing a prepaid SIM.

GSM mobile phones are in wide use all over the country. LTE and 5G technology is available through all providers, but service may get spotty outside urban areas. The usual cost of an international long-distance call to the United States, Europe or other major countries is ~~US\$0.40~~ per minute unless you pre-purchase a qualifying IDD package. Calls to mobile phones and local landlines cost ~~₱6.50~~ per minute for prepaid; you won't be charged for incoming calls unless you are roaming. Text messages typically cost as little as ~~₱1~~. International SMS costs ~~₱15-25~~. Mobile networks offer packages with unlimited Philippine calls and SMS; the unlimited part refers to calls to any philippine mobile number but not landline.

Reloading (i.e. recharging or topping-up) prepaid SIMs is a breeze. Electronic Load (E-Load) stations are everywhere from small corner stores to the large malls to online retailers such as Lazada. You may also top up using the network's mobile app and your credit card. You can purchase pre-paid cards which are available in denominations of ~~₱100~~, ~~₱300~~ and ~~₱500~~.

Pay phones are very hard to find. Phone cards are usually sold by shops which sell cellphone pre-paid loads and cards. Phone cards of one company can not be used with the other company's card-operated phones.

Internet

See also: Internet access

Internet access at broadband speeds are plentiful in city malls, much less so outside the cities, but are growing at a rapid pace. In public areas, WiFi is usually free but often time-limited per day. Most hotels offer free WiFi for the duration of the guests' stay. The SM and Ayala chain of malls also offer free Wi-Fi

anywhere in the mall. On several government-owned public areas, like parks, free Wi-Fi had been implemented, but signal strength fluctuates.

A mobile broadband modem with service by Globe or Smart starts at ₱800 with 5G-capable pocket WiFi devices costing in the upper four- to lower five digits. Mobile broadband signals vary depending on the available local infrastructure and even time of the day (night times. Smart has the largest network in the country, followed by Globe, and then Sun. It takes up to 24 hours for internet to be available on a new SIM card. Mobile broadband comes in postpaid (available to Philippine residents only) and prepaid variants. Modems and subscriptions are available in the larger cities. Service can cost as little as ₱20 an hour. Service is usually slower .



Internet cafe in San Jose, Baliuag, Bulacan

Cybercriminals may exploit public Wi-Fi networks to steal private information. **Avoid** using public Wi-Fi networks when performing online transactions, especially bank transactions. If it's unavoidable, remember to **forget** the public Wi-Fi network after using, so that cybercriminals will find it difficult to track you. Using a VPN is also advisable.

Internet cafes (*kompyuteran*, aka *computer shops*) are no longer important establishments to access the Internet as virtually most people you will meet connect to WiFi or mobile broadband with their own devices, although some computers may be offered for customers to access the files they need to print. Most new Internet cafés are small coin-operated *pisonet*, common in residential settings, but larger ones such as the Netopia and Mineski Infinity chains, which are aimed toward online gamers, still exist. It costs ₱1 per 5 minutes on a "pisonet", and ₱20/hour and up on larger ones. Many also offer printing and photocopying for a small fee (usually ₱5).

Most popular websites and web services should be accessible in the Philippines. Internet censorship is limited, mostly targeting child pornography, which is illegal in the Philippines.

Mail

In order to send items via post, you must visit a post office and present your items to a teller as there are no postage boxes. Check out the [Philippine Postal Corporation's \(PHLPOST\) website \(https://www.phlpost.gov.ph\)](https://www.phlpost.gov.ph) to find the post offices that serve your destination. Alternatively, you may be able to ask your hotel's staff to send your posts together with theirs, and in some provinces, some stationery stores also offer to sell postage stamps and receive posts.

Apart from the Philippine postal service, FedEx, UPS, and DHL courier services are also available. Local couriers such as LBC and Aboitiz are also available. Postal mail from abroad is often lost, so don't send anything valuable.

Go next

- [Sabah](#) - a state in Malaysia on the island of Borneo
- [Taiwan](#) - a country north of [Batanes](#), Philippines

- Northern Sulawesi - just south of Mindanao
-

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