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Photo by Mitch Miguel

Rosy Prospects

Seasoned travel journalist Earl D.C. Bracamonte highlights the bright spots of the recent World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report

Last Valentine's Day, President Benigno S. Aquino III emphasized the government's efforts to develop the Philippines as one of the world's top travel and tourism destinations. P-Noy, as the President is fondly called, was speaking before the members, delegates and participants of the Philippine Travel Agencies Association's (PTAA) 21st Travel Tour Expo 2014—the largest trade fairs of travel agencies,

airlines, hotels, and resorts in the country held at the SMX Convention Center in Pasay City from February 14 to 16.

"We cannot be satisfied with what we have achieved so far. The goal now is not merely to maintain our growth, but to cement our position as one of the world's vacation hot spots," he said.

P-Noy has the numbers to back his claims as the government was able to exceed its projection: the five-

year target of 35.5 million domestic tourists, for instance, was surpassed in a matter of two years in 2011 when the Philippines enjoyed 37.5 million domestic tourist arrivals.

Last year *Rough Guides* named the Philippines as one of the top 10 destinations in 2014. *The New York Times* also listed it as one of the 46 places to go. Closer to home, the *Shanghai Morning Post* considered it as 2013's

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Rosy Prospects

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Best Tropical Island Destination; the previous year it was the Most Romantic Destination.

All of these seem to snowball from the recent World Economic Forum Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report where the Philippines was cited as the most improved country in the region, ranking 16th regionally and 82nd overall, 32nd overall among 140 countries, up 12 places since last edition.

Strength in Numbers

Among the country’s comparative strengths are its natural resources (44th), its price competitiveness (24th), and a very strong—and improving—prioritization of the Travel & Tourism (T&T) industry (this indicator ranks 15th, as government spending on the sector as a percentage of gross domestic product [GDP] is now first in the world, and tourism marketing and branding campaigns are seen to be increasingly effective).

“The ambitious target of increasing arrivals by one million will also require an ambitious budget,” Department of Tourism (DoT) Undersecretary Daniel Corpuz told the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* in justifying the 2013 tourism budget of PhP2.63 billion, a 90% jump from 2012’s PhP1.38 billion.

Although the DoT fell short in meeting its 2013 target, the 4.7 million foreigners who visited the Philippines was a 9.56% increase from 2012 figures, the ABS-CBN news site reported last February.

To date, South Korea remained the biggest source of tourists, rising 13% to 1.16 million in 2013. South Koreans accounted for 25% of the country’s visitor arrivals last year.

Meanwhile, the number of tourists from the United States, which make up 15% of the total tourist arrivals, reached 652,626 in 2013, a 3.3% increase from the previous year.

The DoT hopes to increase tourism arrivals yearly, and by 2016 it aims to have 10 million foreign visitors a year.

Encourage Investments, Build Infrastructure

In addition, the WEF Report wrote that the country has been ensuring that several aspects of its policy rules and regulations regime are conducive to the development of the T&T sector. Among these are better protection of property rights, more openness toward foreign investments, and few visa requirements for foreign visitors (ranked 7th).

However, other areas—such as the difficulty of starting a business in the country, in both cost and length of the process (ranked 94th and 117th, respectively)—remain a challenge.

Moreover, safety and security concerns (ranked 103rd); inadequate health and hygiene (94th); and underdeveloped ground transport, tourism, and Information and Communication Technology infrastructure are all holding back the potential of the economy’s T&T competitiveness.

Suddenly, DoT Secretary Ramon Jimenez’s proposal of convergence as one of the keys in drastically improving tourism in the country during the congressional hearing of his department’s 2013 budget all made sense.

For instance, the Department of Public Works and Highways has set aside PhP12 billion for the construction, improvement and rehabilitation of access roads to tourist destinations, stated the *PDI* report. The Department of Transportation and Communications would spend PhP3.29 billion to build and improve airports and navigational facilities, as well as seaports.

Private Pitch

Another pillar where the Philippines posted high marks is air transport infrastructure—not so much for the quality but for the quantity: domestic airline

seat kms/week placed 20th, 31st for international airline seat kms/week; and 39th for number of operating airlines.

Two years ago, San Miguel Corporation bought the controlling stake of the country’s flag carrier, Philippine Airlines (PAL), and immediately started a massive re-fleeting program in preparation for the lifting of ban on Philippine carriers to mount new and additional flights to US and EU. On top of the 64 aircraft from Airbus SAS that it bought during its first year, PAL ordered six Boeing 777 last October intended for long haul flights.

Then there are the new players such as Skyjet and TigerAir.

“In the service industry, you need to take care of your clients,” Tiger Air Philippines CEO Olive Ramos said. “Eventually, they’ll bring back business to you through loyal patronage. Consumers have become younger and they’re empowered with sound decisions from very informed choices.

The Philippines is a growing population and the fastest growing sector is the middle class. There’s still growth for the call centers in the next 20 years; and this is one of the sectors bringing in a large chunk of travelers, whether here or abroad.”

While Ninoy Aquino International Airport Terminal 1 remains outdated by two decades and has consistently garnered the rotten tomato award for airports of the world, in recent years there are several new international airports which are either built from the ground up, or reconstructed from old structures like Bacolod-Silay, Clark, Davao, General Santos, Iloilo, Kalibo, Laguindingan, Laoag, Puerto

Princesa, and Zamboanga International Airports.

“The Manila airports have now been decongested,” claimed Ramos. “Whereas before travelers need to pass Manila before flying to other destinations across the archipelago. Now, they can go directly to many points of the country from most Asian destinations. Newer connections are also coming up.”

Tourism Equals Jobs

The tourism industry accounts for nine percent of the (global) gross domestic product pegged at USD6 trillion. It generated 120 million direct jobs as well as 125 million indirect positions in related industries. In short, it accounted for one in every 11 jobs that made up the entire work force.

“Travel & Tourism is one of the leading job creators in the world,” wrote Rochelle Turner of World Travel & Tourism Council. “The share of world employment in Travel & Tourism is greater than that for the auto manufacturing and chemicals manufacturing industries combined, across every region of the world.”

Furthermore, the outlook for the industry is relatively positive: of the increase of 66 million T&T jobs forecast worldwide in the next 10 years, 62% are expected in the Asia Pacific region, an estimated overall growth rate of 1.9% per annum from 2012 to 2022.

Within the region, India and China were directly responsible for 48% of T&T jobs worldwide during 2011, compared with 43% across all other sectors of the economy. In Asia, there are seven times as many T&T jobs as auto manufacturing jobs and five times more than chemicals manufacturing jobs. Travel & Tourism directly employs nearly as many people as the region’s entire education sector.

Back in PTAA’s Travel Tour Expo, P-Noy affirmed the administration’s programs to harness the beauty and the hospitality that the Philippines is known for.

“The possibilities ahead are limitless now that the world knows that it is more fun in the Philippines—and each one of us is asked to do his part to realize these possibilities,” the President concluded. ●

news bytes

PHL grants visa-free privilege to 7 more countries

The Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) announced that effective April 15, nationals of seven additional countries will now enjoy visa-free privilege to enter the Philippines for a period of stay of 30 days. These countries are Belize, Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The privilege aims to promote tourism and investments from these countries, all of which have been emerging as key players in the international economic community and have growing bilateral ties with the Philippines.

“The DFA fully supports national efforts to attract more tourists and potential investors to the Philippines. In particular, the DFA, through its various embassies and consulates abroad, has been playing an active role in helping the Department of Tourism reach its target of 10 million foreign tourist arrivals by 2015,” said DFA Undersecretary Rafael E. Seguis.

A list of all countries with visa-free privilege, now numbering 157, is available at the DFA website at <https://www.dfa.gov.ph/index.php/site-administrator/visa-information>.

Transparency, accountability in extractive industries pushed by UK-backed initiative

In support of the Philippine Government’s economic growth agenda, a civil society group is working on a project to improve transparency and accountability in extractive industries.

Bantay Kita, a civil society representative in the PH-EITI multi-stakeholder group (MSG), signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the British Embassy Manila on a continuing grant assistance to push the Philippines’ candidacy to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

EITI is a global coalition of governments, companies and civil society working together to bolster openness and good governance of revenues from natural resources, to cultivate and maximize equitable growth.

“The Philippines has a wealth of natural resources, and the sustainable extraction of these precious materials can really make a difference in the country’s economy,” says newly-appointed British Ambassador Asif Ahmad.

“We support the Philippine Government’s initiative to manage its resources in a responsible manner through EITI, to curb corruption and conflict and encourage more equitable growth that will benefit everyone. The choice facing the country is not how to stop mining and energy extraction but to stop those who act outside the law and care little for the impact on communities.”

PHL-Poland renews trade ties

Philippine Ambassador to Poland Patricia Ann V. Paez met with Governor Piotr Litwa and Deputy Governor Andrzej Pilot and discussed state of trade and economic relations between the Philippines and Poland in the Silesian Voivodeship Office in Katowice last April 8.

Ambassador Paez stressed that physical distance between the two countries should not be a barrier to bilateral trade. Deputy Governor Pilot likewise observed that a lack of information about the Philippines in Poland is a hindrance to a more robust bilateral economic relations.

According to the Philippines’ Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), the volume of trade between the Philippines and Poland in 2012 was valued at USD63.12 million. In 2013, this went down to USD50.45 million, with Philippine exports to Poland amounting to only USD34.20 million and imports from Poland amounting to USD16.25 million. The balance of trade was in the Philippines’ favor at USD17.95 million.

Silesia is a region of central Europe now located mostly in Poland, with smaller parts in the Czech Republic and Germany. Silesia is divided into Lower Silesia and Upper Silesia. Silesia is rich in mineral and natural resources and includes several important industrial centers.

Today, Katowice is the 16th economically powerful city by gross domestic product in the European Union, with an output amounting to USD114.5 billion.



British Ambassador Asif Ahmad and Bantay Kita’s National Coordinator Cielo Magno shake hands after signing the grant agreement that promotes transparency in the mining industry.

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ON THE COVER: “Mayon in Infrared”

Amateur photographer Mitch C. Miguel captures the splendor that is Mayon Volcano in Albay using infrared technique, making the scene look like a winter wonderland. A sales representative for a steel company, Mitch joins photowalks with friends to far-off places like Mt. Province, Albay, and recently Bangkok, Bali and Hanoi.

Gaze Into an Endless Summer

At the Northern part of Anvaya Cove, Ayala Land unveils a vibrant neighborhood cascading into astonishing landscapes. Welcome to Fairway Crest.

Ayala Land Premier makes sure that the most important place in your life is also the most exceptional. Environments designed with discernment and taste. Distinctive communities in breathtaking locations, ensuring life and living at its finest.

HOME IN NATURE'S EMBRACE

A rare opportunity unfurls. Sheltered by the resplendent mountains of Morong, Bataan—just 15 minutes away from Subic Freeport—Ayala Land Premier's first leisure development, Anvaya Cove, reveals a remarkable new community in this gleaming destination for sports and socials.

Heightening the success of an extraordinary portfolio of residential formats, Anvaya Cove presents Fairway Crest, a 5.7-hectare expanse strategically located near holes 11 to 15 of a championship golf course. An intimate neighborhood of only 29 lots—generously sized at 675 to 1,565 sqm—this is Anvaya Cove's most exclusive address yet.

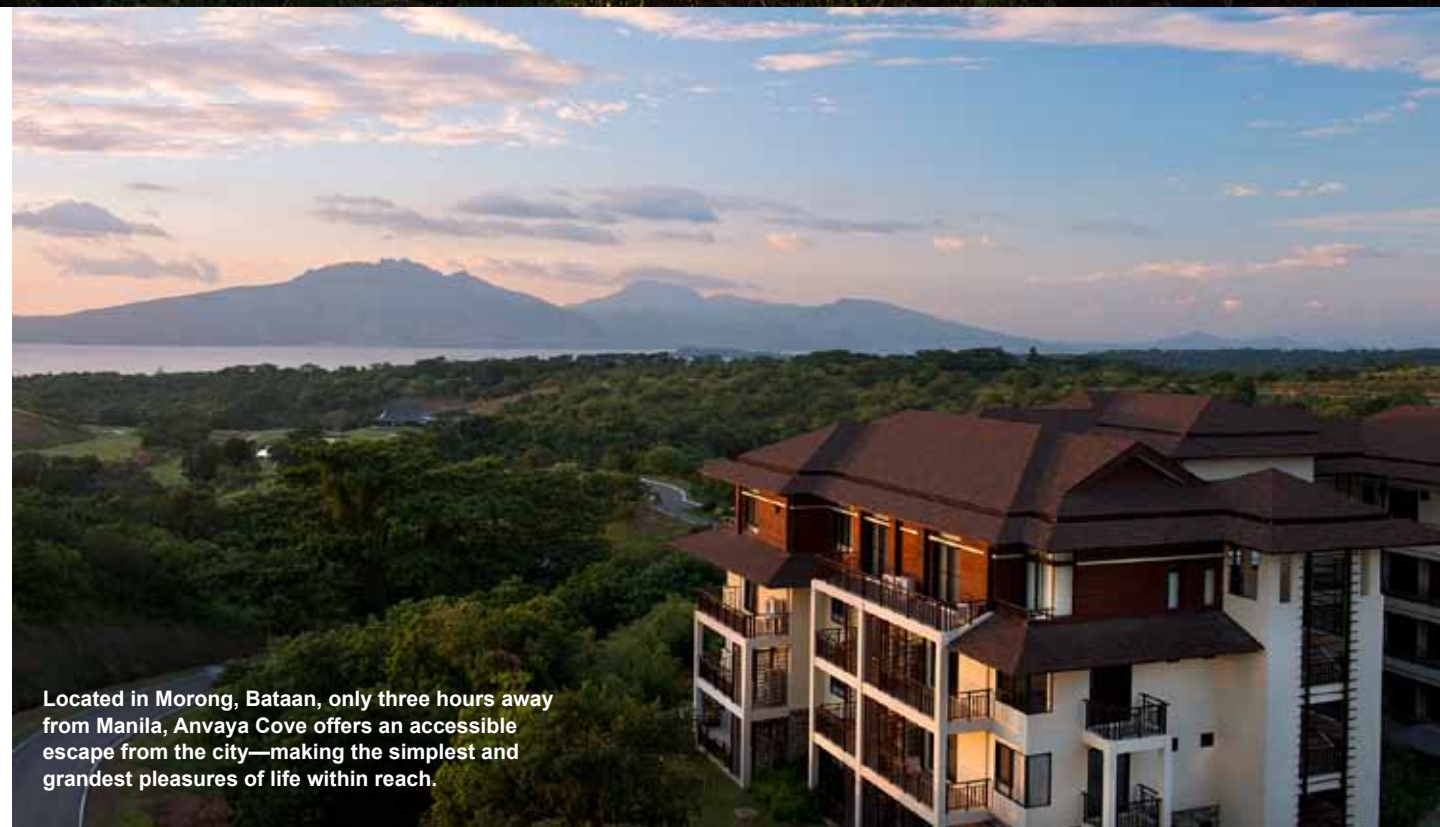
An intelligent master plan opening up unparalleled views of vast greens sweeping into magnificent sea, breathtaking vistas reveal versatile connections to Anvaya Cove's coveted leisure and sports facilities.

Each Anvaya Cove community offers a distinctive living experience. A summer residence in one of the development's outstanding neighborhoods, or finding the perfect unit in The Seascape Ridge or Sea Breeze Verandas—Anvaya Cove provides the right space for families of every size.

FIND YOUR PLACE BETWEEN SURF AND TURF

Sustainably crafted. Internationally acclaimed. Distinctively original. Anvaya Cove combines the excitement of a seaside resort and the tranquility of a mountain retreat. Designed for shared moments among family, Anvaya Cove offers endless opportunities to forge lifelong memories.

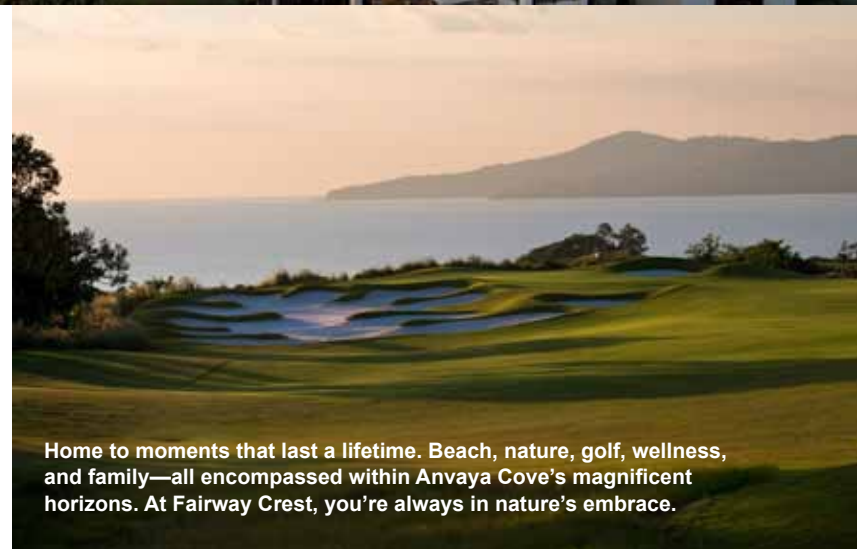
A soothing refuge of greens and blues, adventures begin at the Anvaya Cove Beach and Nature Club. Discovering forest trails. Laying in the sand. Splashing in the pool. You know you've found a treasure trove when family encounters with nature are a tradition.



Located in Morong, Bataan, only three hours away from Manila, Anvaya Cove offers an accessible escape from the city—making the simplest and grandest pleasures of life within reach.

At the Anvaya Cove Golf and Sports Club, the ultimate leisure experience is in full swing. The 18-hole, par 72, all-weather, world-class golf course brings enthusiasts of all skill levels to approximately 82 hectares of championship-level terrain. The club's extensive gym facilities, multi-sports courts, and new pool complex expand myriad horizons on fitness. After a good workout, dining at the Lake Front Nine, Tee Room, or Tap-in Bar and Café is the perfect way to unwind. Facilities geared towards nurturing your game—delivered in the Ayala Land Premier heritage of excellence.

For inquiries, please call (632) 908 3908 or visit www.ayalalandpremier.com or download the Anvaya Cove app from the Apple App Store.



Home to moments that last a lifetime. Beach, nature, golf, wellness, and family—all encompassed within Anvaya Cove's magnificent horizons. At Fairway Crest, you're always in nature's embrace.

Alien Employment 101

Attys. Roderico V. Puno and Alfred D. Molo provide a primer on working permits and visas for foreign nationals who intend to work in the Philippines

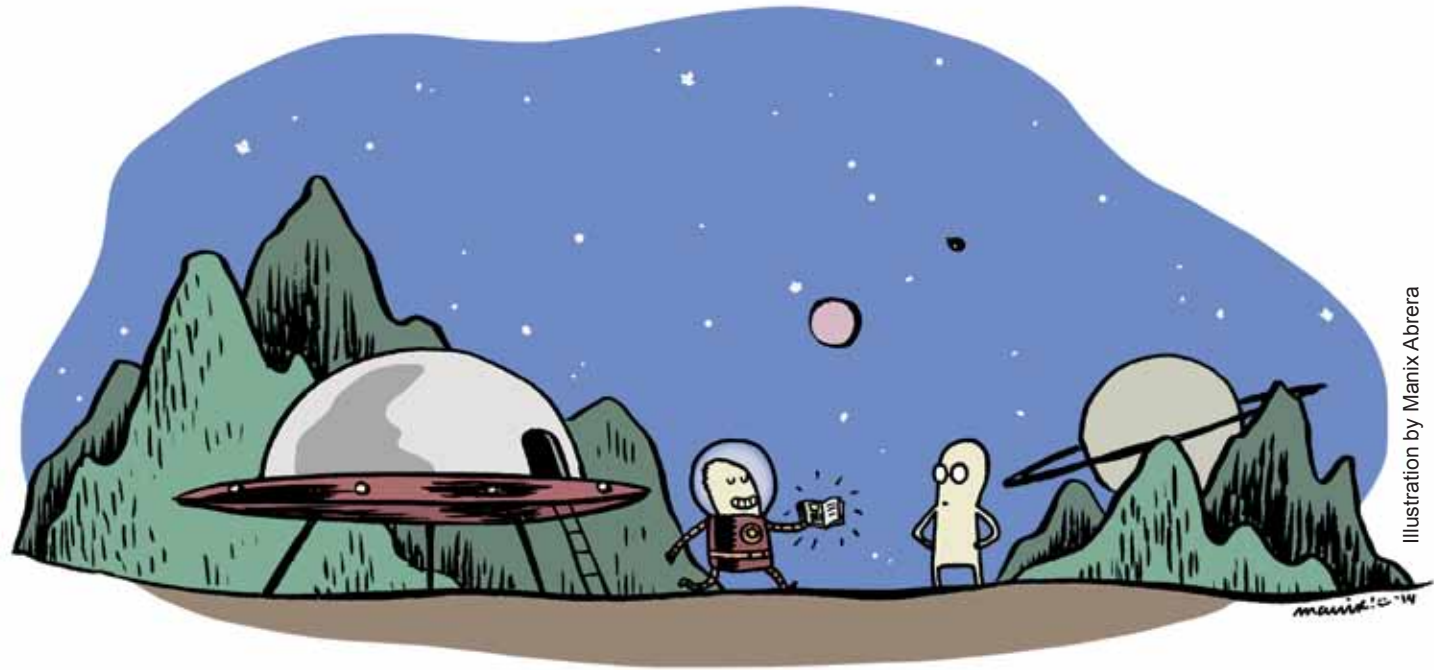


Illustration by Manix Abrera

What is an Alien Employment Permit (AEP)?

An AEP is a document issued by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) to all foreign nationals who intend to engage in gainful employment in the Philippines.

Who are exempted from securing an AEP?

- a. All members of the diplomatic service and foreign government officials accredited by and with reciprocity arrangement with the Philippine government;
- b. Officers and staff of international organizations of which the Philippine government is a member, and their legitimate spouses desiring to work in the Philippines;
- c. Foreign nationals elected as members of the governing board who do not occupy any other position, but only have voting rights in the corporation;

- d. All foreign nationals granted exemption by law;
- e. Owners and representatives of foreign principals whose companies are accredited by the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, who come to the Philippines for a limited period and solely for the purpose of interviewing Filipino applicants for employment abroad;
- f. Foreign nationals who come to the Philippines to teach, present and/or conduct research studies in universities and colleges as visiting, exchange or adjunct professors under formal agreements between the universities or colleges in the Philippines and foreign universities or colleges, or between the Philippine government and foreign government, provided that the exemption is in reciprocal basis; and
- g. Permanent resident foreign nationals,

probationary or temporary resident visa holders.

What are the grounds for denial of an AEP application?

- a. Misrepresentation of facts in the application;
- b. Submission of falsified documents;
- c. Foreign national has been convicted of a criminal offense or a fugitive from justice; or
- d. Availability of a Filipino who is competent, able and willing to do the job intended for the foreign national.

What is the period of validity of an AEP?

The AEP shall be valid for the position and company for which it was issued for a period of one year, unless otherwise provided in the employment contract, consultancy services, or other modes of engagement, which in no case shall exceed five years.

What is the penalty for working without valid AEP and for employing foreign nationals without valid AEP?

Foreign nationals found working without valid AEP and employers found employing foreign nationals without a valid AEP shall each pay a fine of Ten Thousand Pesos (PhP10,000.00) for every year or a fraction thereof.

What is a Provisional Work Permit (PWP)?

A PWP is a permit that must be secured at the Bureau of Immigration by foreign nationals who have commenced employment while applications for AEP or 9(g) working [commercial] visa (“9G Visa”) are still pending.

What is the period of validity of a PWP?

A PWP shall be valid for three months or until a pre-arranged employment (commercial) visa has been issued in favor of the foreign national, whichever comes first.

What is a 9G Visa?

9G Visa refers to the pre-arranged employment visa under Sections 9(g) and 20 of the Philippine Immigration Act of 1940 available to foreign nationals who will engage in gainful employment in the Philippines. The AEP from the DOLE and the Special Temporary Permit (STP) from the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC), for those practicing a regulated profession, are some of the requirements for 9G Visa.

Who are the dependents of the foreign national who can be included in his 9G Visa?

The spouse and unmarried child/ren below 21 years old of the foreign national may be

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7 Ways, 7 Places...

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of Saint James the Apostle in Paete; and the Church of Saint Gregory the Great in Majayjay.

5. Appreciate art in Rizal.

The town of Angono in Rizal is said to be the Art Capital of the Philippines, which produced two National Artists, painter Carlos “Botong” Francisco and musician and composer Lucio San Pedro. It also boasts of numerous visual artists whose works you will find in the town’s several art galleries. Prominent painter Nemesio Miranda Jr., also known as Nemiranda, transformed his house into the Nemiranda Art House, a popular tourist stop. In the house where Carlos Francisco lived, his son Totong Francisco put up The Second

Gallery. Also worth a visit are the Blanco Family Museum, Ang Nuno Artists Foundation Gallery and Angono Ateliers Gallery. Perhaps the oldest work of art in the country can be found in Angono, near the border of Binangonan. A National Cultural Treasure, the Angono Petroglyphs, said to date back to around 3000 B.C., are rock engravings of 127 human and animal figures. In Antipolo City, the capital of Rizal is home to the art space of Pinto Gallery. Since 1970s neurologist and art patron Dr. Joven Cuanang have been developing his weekend retreat, which is now a wonderland of gardens and art galleries.

6. Food-trip in Cavite.

With its cooler climate, commanding view of the Taal Lake and Volcano and easy access from the metro, the city on the ridge of a mountain, Tagaytay, has long been a favorite destination of urbanites for a quick getaway. Along with the sprouting of resorts and inns, a number of restaurants have also cropped up, and many of them prove to be a dining destination like **Antonio’s**, deemed as the country’s best restaurant, according to the *Miele Guide*. Another foodie favorite is **Sonya’s Garden**, which serves fresh salads of greens grown in Tagaytay. Most of the local restaurants take advantage of the vegetables cultivated here. On the outskirts of Tagaytay **Alfonso**, the Tuscan-inspired country home of British Neil and Antiquena Marcia Adams, offers Mediterranean-style dishes in a rustic garden setting. **Bawai’s Vietnamese Kitchen**, **Chateau Hestia Garden Restaurant**, and **Kalamunda** are some of Tagaytay restaurants that are worth trying. Along the road, popular restaurants **Viewsite** and **Josephine’s** offer *bulalo* soup and crispy *tawilis*, freshwater sardine found only in Taal Lake and for which Batangas is famous for.



RING OF FIRE. The crater lake of Mt. Pinatubo in Zambales and (left) the garden in Pinto Gallery, Antipolo, Rizal.

Photo by Weili Ting

7. Go on an adventure and hiking in Porac, Pampanga.

About two-and-a-half hour drive north of Manila is the recently-opened adventure park SandBox in the lahar-struck Porac, Pampanga. A main feature of Alviera, Ayala Land’s integrated township development, the park also has the Giant Swing at 10-meters high; the 180-meter Avatar One Roller Coaster Zipline; the 15-meter Adventure Tower, which facilitates rock climbing, rappelling and free fall; the Aerial Walk high rope adventure; ATV and mini-ATV rides; a themed kiddie playground with picnic areas; mini-golf; camping sites; and 5,000 square meter pump track for cyclists. The Sandbox is in the *barangay* of Sapang Uwak, which is a popular route for hikers on their way to the peak of Mount Pinatubo. For more adrenaline rushes, Clark Field, which is around the area, offers sky-diving at the Omni Aviation Complex and wakeboarding at the Decawake Clark Cable Park. ●



Photo by Roel Manipon



Photo from Shutterstock.com

The Fallacy of Easy

I am always amused when a reference is made to ‘the ease of doing business’ as one of the criteria monitored by the World Economic Forum. My standard answer is: there is no ease of doing business.

In this context, I was also amused by the statement of Energy Secretary Jericho Petilla. With reference to the tight energy supply in various parts of the country, he encouraged the private sector to build new power generation plants. Being aware that more than 100 permits are needed before construction can commence, there are certainly hardly any quick solutions. I am convinced five permits should be enough from the Department of Energy (DOE), Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC), Department of Natural Environment and Resources (DENR), Bureau of Investments (BOI), and local government units (LGU).

It is internationally recognized that foreign direct investments (FDI) is imperative both for developed and developing economies. Benefits can be seen across the spectrum of activities not only with respect to investible resources but its corresponding capital formation. Such investment drives economic productivity, creates jobs, raises income levels, transfers production technology, strengthens innovative capacity, as well as creates access to international marketing networks.

Countries, in fact, are competing by launching their industrial development programs, reforming their institutions and offering various investment incentives to influence the investors’ location decisions thereby permitting the flow of FDI. Allow me to add, that countries are also looking at making it easy to invest and, most importantly, delivering the incentives that are promised at the beginning of the investment process!

The Philippine government encourages foreign investments since it generates employment opportunities, boosts economic development, increases financial resources, increases exports by raising efficiency, and enhances marketing opportunities.

At present, there are about 13 investment promotion agencies (IPAs) that administer their respective investment incentive packages. IPAs may be defined as government entities created by law, executive order, decree or other issuance for the purpose of attracting domestic and foreign direct investment through the administration of their respective fiscal and non-fiscal incentives; and, exercise regulatory powers over the economic zones. These include the following: BOI, Philippine Economic Zone Authority (PEZA), Bases Conversion Development Authority (BCDA), Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA), Clark Development Corporation (CDC), Poro Point Management Corporation (PPMC), Bataan Technology Park, Inc. (BTPI), Authority of the Freeport Bataan (AFAB), Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) and many others.

In a study conducted by the World Bank with the International Finance Corporation in 2013, relative to the ease of doing business in 185 economies, the Philippines ranked 138. The first top five criteria where the country ranked low were in starting a business; registration of property; paying taxes; getting credit; and protecting investors.

In the Philippines, the rights of a foreign investor are provided for in the Investment Incentives Act, to wit: a) right to repatriate the entire proceeds



FROM THE DESK

By **Henry Schumacher**
VP External Affairs, European Chamber of Commerce of the Philippines (ECCP)

of the liquidation of the investment; b) right to remit earnings from the investment; c) right to remit sums as may be necessary to meet the payments of interest and principal on foreign loans and obligations arising from technological assistance contracts; and, d) freedom from expropriation except for public use or in the interest of national welfare or defense and upon payment of just compensation.

Investor protection requires a “well-defined standard of responsibility of a state to a foreign investor which will safeguard the foreign investment” (Landau 1968). In general, foreign investments are protected through private investment agreements with the host country such as incentives of income tax holidays and through bilateral and multi-lateral agreements, treaties, legislation and arbitration. Disputes relating to foreign investments are resolved through submission to international commercial arbitration, i.e. International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID).

Domestically, issues relating to foreign investors on their investments in the Philippines are brought before the courts. However, judicial dispute resolution takes years and is often tedious and expensive. Moreover, courts are known to promulgate decisions with varying interpretations on laws thereby changing the generally accepted rules at the time when foreign investment was made. This apparent uncertainty and lack of stability renders the foreign investor vulnerable and at a high risk of losing his investment or one that necessitates an abrupt change in his investment structure.

In the case of San Roque Power Corporation, for instance, the Supreme Court overturned the decision of the Court of Tax Appeals after almost ten (10) years, disallowing the claim for refund and confusing the lower courts and investors what the rules for refund finally are. The foreign investor is lost in the maze of a myriad of requirements, permits, endorsements, certificates, and delays; and, the present investor protection mechanism is not enough considering that settlement of disputes in court is protracted.

It is therefore strongly suggested that a Cabinet-level Office for Investor Facilitation and Protection be created.

As investor facilitator, it shall act as a coordinator for foreign investors on one hand, and the 13 IPAs on the other, in terms of expediting business registration requirements, setting up of business and of the requirements for the availment of the investment incentives programs of government.

As investor protector, it shall have the power to settle expeditiously controversies and disputes using the alternative dispute resolution (ADR) between the IPAs, other related government agencies and departments with respect to the administration of investment incentives program and grant of the investment incentives and the foreign investors. The grant of incentives to the foreign investor under the investment program is a contract between the government and the investor. As such, the investor protector must see to it that it is complied with before any of the parties involved pushes the case into the courts where they linger for years.

This will afford ease in conducting dialogue mechanism between the government and the investors; secure operational freedom and high-level reporting channels, facilitate investments faster and protect investors constructively. ●



Illustration by Conrad Javier

All Aboard

Book author Randy Anderson shows us how to navigate the world of Philippine real estate

If you are one of the many expats who fall in love with the Philippines and plan to live here for an extended time, it's a good idea to take an informed look at buying your own piece of paradise.

The Philippine real estate market is currently going through boom times. We're talking about double digit growth rates. While the country did suffer from the 1997 Asian financial crisis, it has dramatically rebounded from the lows of that crash and with key structural reforms in the local banking industry, the Philippines is less susceptible now to such a crash. Interestingly, one of the few real estate markets that survived the global credit crunch and real estate and financial meltdown of 2008-2009 was the Philippines.

If you have decided to buy but don't want to pay through the nose for premium Philippine real estate, the good news is that there are certain tips and tactics that will save you money.

First and foremost you should always deal directly with the property owners. A key driver of the cost of a particular piece of Philippine real estate is the number of agents and brokers involved. Some of these "brokers" are not actually licensed real estate agents but middlemen who introduce buyers and owners and receive a fee or percentage of the sale. This can dramatically drive up the cost of the property. Always find out who the real owners are and deal with them directly.

Many Americans and Europeans are surprised when they cannot simply buy a house and lot in the Philippines and have a clear property title in their names like they do in their home countries. Unlike countries where there is a definite title transfer process, there is no formal title searches or title insurance and the buyer should carefully check the ownership of the land. Land records are inaccurate and there is a proliferation of fake and double or overlapping titles.

Another tip is to pay attention to the real estate developer's reputation. If you are looking at prices during a market upturn, developer identity pretty much doesn't matter. Your property will increase in price regardless of who developed your particular condominium, project or subdivision.

However, developer identity does matter when there is a market downturn. Lesser known developers get hit harder than established real estate development companies like Ayala Land Incorporated or SM Development Corporation.

Over time there is a likelihood of some market downturns and having a highly respected developer can help insulate you from potential financial losses.

Anybody can invest in a real estate market that is already hot. Usually when a big developer like Ayala decides to develop a particular area, the golden opportunity for getting a bargain on nearby real estate has passed. If you do invest in those areas, for example, Makati or Global City the potential that the property will appreciate significantly is quite low.

The better alternative is buying real estate in up and coming areas. In the Metro Manila area, many key developments are beginning to take place along the south

Luzon expressway corridor. By paying careful attention to low cost land areas that border this corridor, you can make quite a bit of money in real estate speculation.

We've looked at some tips and tactics, now let's look at what kinds of property is available to the expat buyer.

Under Philippine law, foreigners cannot own land, but can own condominium units or apartments in high-rise buildings. With the countless high-rise condos going up all over Manila, it's easy to find one in the area you like. All the major developers offer the same

basic buying options—usually a low down payment in the PhP20,000 to PhP50,000 range and no interest payments for three years.

The thing to be aware of is that you may not take possession during this period. It's only after you have either paid off the balance either by cash or a homeowner's loan that you are given the keys.

In 2011, I bought a new 48 square meter condo in an excellent location from one of the major developers for just over PhP5 million. My downpayment was only PhP25,000 with monthly interest free payments of PhP35,000. I did not need to move in immediately so I paid the monthly payments for two years and then obtained a loan from a major local bank.

Upon approval of the loan the developers turned over the condo to me. There is a monthly association fee of PhP48.00 per square meter which is about average. This covers maintenance on all the common areas including the

BEYOND BROCHURES

If you look at official reports of the real estate market in the Philippines, it's very easy to get excited. Make no mistake about it—there's a lot of money to be made in Philippine real estate. Many investors are seeing double digit gains on their investments and, if you reach back a few years, these gains can easily go into triple digits. However, if you read between the lines and look below the surface, there are some serious causes for concern regarding the long term health of the Philippines real estate market.

The Problem of Low Purely Local Demand. Many of the major condominium and housing subdivision projects in the Philippines are fueled by the steady flow of remittances by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW). This could be a serious problem since if something happens with the external demand, there is very little purely local demand to make up for the lost demand.

The Problem of Market Segments. Much of the action in the Philippine real estate market takes place in the low to middle tiers. Unfortunately, there's a lot of high middle and high class subdivisions and condominium projects going up. This may pose serious problems later on if there is a stock market correction or external credit shock which would effectively dry up the high and middle segments of the real estate markets. This would put pressure on the lower end of the market and this can easily lead to serious problems with local Philippine real estate industry.

The Hazards of a Credit-Driven Bubble Market. A lot of the big real estate developers are subsidiaries of large conglomerates which often have a banking arm. Thanks to cheap and easy loans people are able to buy housing that they may not otherwise be able to afford. In normal times, this should be okay. However, if the economy takes a strong hit and this huge class of people can no longer pay their monthly mortgage payments, the banking arm of many conglomerates may take a massive hit.

five swimming pools! The condo purchase does not include a parking space which can run upwards of PhP500,000. I chose to rent a space for PhP9,000 per month.

One popular option for many expats is leasing houses and land on a long term basis. For instance, in the Subic Bay Freeport Zone houses foreigners may enter into a lease

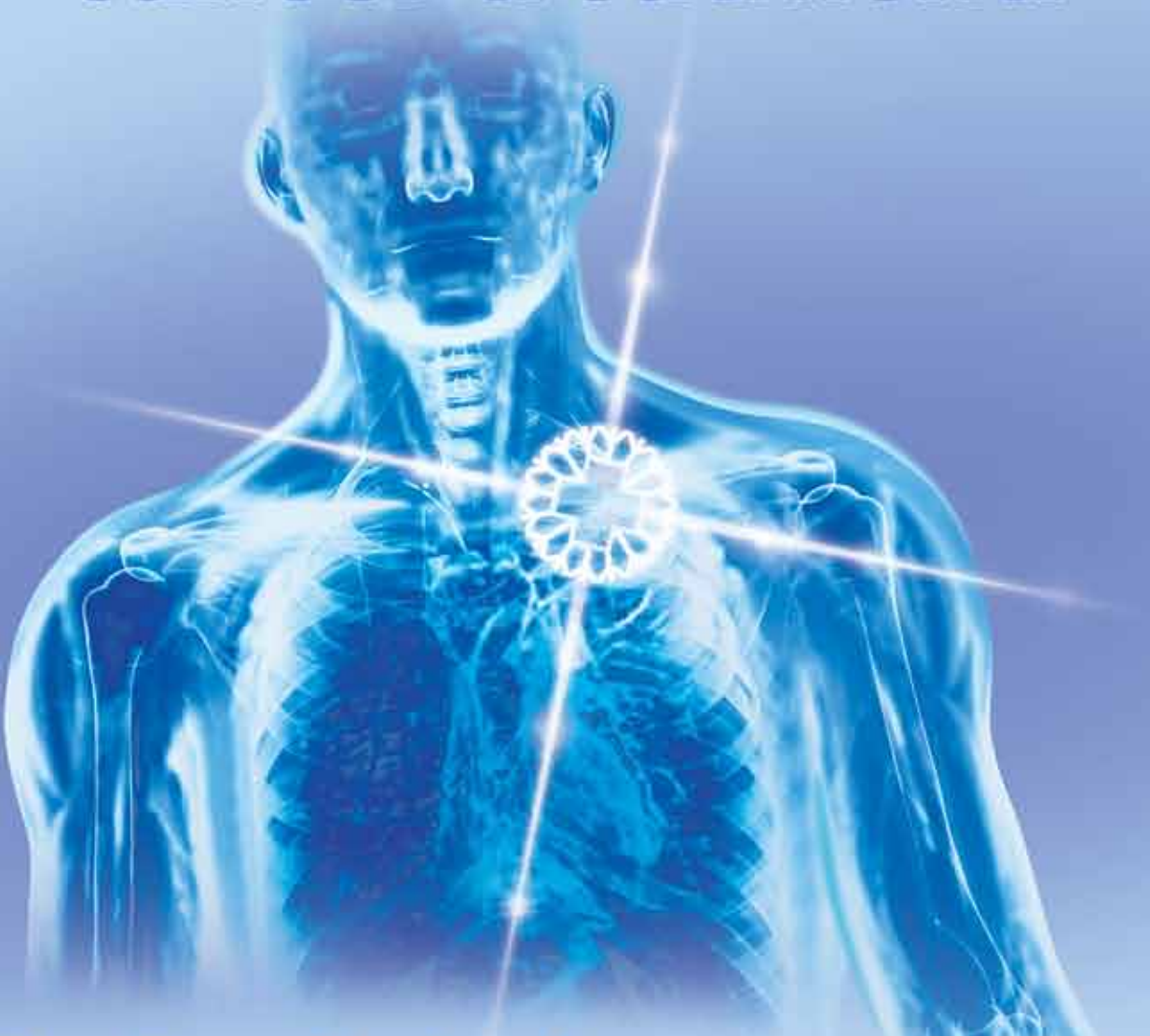
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The Medical City Brings Latest Cancer Treatment to the Country

Premier health institution The Medical City introduces an innovative non-invasive radiotherapy technology that represents a giant leap in terms of precise, personalized and customized cancer treatment.

A true leap in customized cancer treatment.



TrueBeam Technology. First at The Medical City.



At The Medical City Cancer Center, we believe in providing patients with the best treatment options possible. And so we introduce TrueBeam by Varian, a revolutionary radiotherapy system that enables doctors to virtually see the tumor they are treating.

TrueBeam can adjust its beam to match the size and shape of the tumor, allowing doctors to treat even the most challenging and complex cases, while aiding in minimizing the risk of damage to nearby healthy tissues.

Treatment takes just a few minutes a day, sparing the patient from lengthy procedures that may cause unnecessary exposure, discomfort and inconvenience.

We offer you world-class cancer care that is fast, precise, and above all, truly personalized.

Customized cancer treatment through TrueBeam. Only at The Medical City.



TMC is the first, and currently the only, Philippine hospital to acquire the TrueBeam Linear Accelerator, an advanced radiation therapy system that offers a wide range of options for treating tumors including those that are more complex in nature. With the expanded power and flexibility provided by TrueBeam, clinicians are able to develop treatments that are best suited for patients' individual circumstances.

TrueBeam is created by Varian Medical Systems, the world's leading manufacturer of medical devices and software for treating cancer and other medical conditions.

TrueBeam allows doctors to virtually see and target tumors anywhere in the body, precisely matching their size, shape, and even motion. With this latest technology, treatment can now be customized with pinpoint accuracy, reducing the risk of damage to healthy tissue and sparing the patient from unnecessary pain and lengthy procedures.

The precision of the TrueBeam system is measured in increments of less than a millimeter. This accuracy is made possible by the system's sophisticated architecture, which synchronizes imaging, patient positioning, motion management, beam shaping and dose delivery, performing accuracy checks every ten milliseconds throughout the entire treatment.

TrueBeam's pinpoint accuracy allows clinicians to treat many different types of tumors, including those in sensitive areas such as the abdomen, liver, lung, breast, and head and neck. Treatments focus powerful radiation on the tumor while minimizing exposure of surrounding healthy tissues.

This latest technology being offered by TMC Cancer Center and Radiation Oncology Unit also offers shorter treatment times leading to less interruption of patient's daily lives. Treatments that once took 10 to 30 minutes can now be completed in less than two minutes, thus reducing patient discomfort. Faster treatment times also allow for reduced chance of tumor motion during treatment, which makes delivery more accurate and helps to protect nearby healthy tissue and critical organs.

TrueBeam can be used for many forms of advanced treatment techniques including image-guided radiotherapy (IGRT), intensity-modulated radiotherapy (IMRT) and RapidArc® radiotherapy technology. Because of this, patients can receive the treatment that is best suited for their specific clinical circumstances.



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Paula de Lemos, Portuguese Amb. Joaquim Moreira de Lemos, Foreign Sec. Albert del Rosario, Portugal consul Antonio Rufino and Mita Rufino



Dr. Jess Villa, Artist Manny Baldemor, Chef Jessie Sincioco, Guatemala consul Mellie Ablaza, Togo consul Evie Costa, Portuguese Amb. Joaquim Moreira de Lemos, Dr. Alfredo Pascual, Portugal consul Antonio Rufino, Mita Rufino and Marivic Rufino

A Taste of Portugal

Marivic Rufino shares one party that's truly a joy to the senses

We know Portugal's new Honorary Consul Antonio A. Rufino's role is to raise the awareness of Portugal in the historical, cultural and commercial aspects—this is given. What surprised us was his flair to combine both the Portuguese and Philippine culture in one social gathering. Recently at the Rockwell Club Makati, Hon. Rufino hosted an affair that reintroduces Portugal's fine wines through an art exhibit by UNICEF painter Manuel Baldemor, who has been an artist-in-residence in Portugal.

The Port wine and popular Mateus Rose were presented together with fine red wines from the Alentejo and the Douro. The effervescent vinho verde was paired with bacalhau and other delicacies prepared by Chef Jessie at the Rockwell Club. Among Baldemor's stunning watercolor and oil paintings were *Fatima*, the favorite destination of Filipino pilgrims; *Sintra, Cabo da Roca* (the western most tip of the European continent on the Atlantic) and *Sabrossa*, the home of Ferdinand Magellan, the famous Portuguese

navigator who sailed from the Old World in a historic voyage to the Philippines in 1521. Sec. Albert del Rosario of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the non-resident Portuguese Ambassador Joaquim Moreira de Lemos and his wife Paula were guests of honor. Other attendees included several members of the diplomatic corps, businessmen, expats, artists, bankers, artists and wine collectors and aficionados who all enjoyed such a delicious feast for the senses. ●



Amb. Victor Garcia, Stephanie Kai Weng Mullner, Connie Garcia and Austrian Amb. Josef Mullner.



Artist Manny Baldemor, Foreign Sec. Albert del Rosario, Portugal consul Antonio Rufino and Miguel Realmonde



Austrian Amb. Dr. Josef Mullner, Greek Amb. Constantina Koliou, Costa Rica consul general Fausto Preysler, EU Amb. Guy Ledoux, Arthur Lopez, Margaret Ledoux and Anjana Hasper

Alien Employment...

From page 4

included as dependent/s in the 9G Visa application. The documentary requirements for this application include the marriage certificate/contract and the unmarried child's birth certificate/family register or its equivalent, to evidence relationship with the 9G Visa applicant. The marriage certificate or birth certificate issued in the Philippines must be original and issued by the National Statistics Office of the Philippines. If a foreign document, it must be original and authenticated by the Philippine Foreign Service Post, which has jurisdiction over the place of issuance, or by the Department of Foreign Affairs if said document is issued by the local embassy in the Philippines.

What is the period of validity of a 9G Visa?

The validity of the 9G Visa is usually co-terminus with the AEP. The BI, however, has the discretion to grant a 9G Visa with a shorter duration. The foreign national may apply for the extension of his 9G Visa to coincide with the duration of the employment contract.

What is a Special Working Permit (SWP)?

An SWP is a permit issued by the BI to foreign nationals who shall engage in gainful employment for a period of three to six months. Foreign national applying for SWP need not secure an AEP from DOLE.

What is an STP?

An STP is the privilege given to foreign professionals who want to engage in the general practice of state-

regulated professions in the Philippines, engineers, accountants. As mentioned above, this is one of the requirements for a 9G Visa.

What are the requirements in securing the STP of foreign professionals employed by local and foreign private firms or institutions?

- Duly accomplished and notarized application form;
- Copy of the employment contract, consultancy agreement or service contract including project details, scope of work, nature and duration of engagement of the foreign professional;
- Professional liability insurance whenever applicable and required by the professional regulatory law;
- Official document issued by the appropriate government office/agency of the foreign country/state certifying the applicant is a registered professional therein, which must be duly authenticated by the Philippine Embassy/Consulate/Legation to the country/state of the applicant and with official English translation; and
- Photocopy of valid passport as proof of citizenship, identification of the visa issued, and proof of entry in the Philippines.

What is the period of validity of an STP?

The STP shall be valid for the period specified in the board resolution approved by the PRC, which in no case shall exceed one year unless renewed or extended. ●

The following FAQs are the sole opinion of the writers and should not constitute as legal opinion. – **The IMMIGRANT**

Attys. Roderico V. Puno and **Alfred D. Molo** are Senior Partner and Junior Partner, respectively, at Puno & Puno Law Offices. They may be contacted at rvpuno@punolaw.com and admolo@punolaw.com.

All Aboard

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agreement with Filipino landowners for an initial period of up to 50 years renewable once for an additional 25 years and enjoy a lifestyle that rivals what they would have in their home countries. Prices range from Php2 million and up.

If you divide that sum over 50 years you'll see it's very reasonable on a monthly basis. Keep in mind there is a low monthly association fee but it covers such things as trash collection and security.

Perhaps the best way for an expat to control real property in the Philippines is to form a Philippine corporation. Under Philippine law, a corporation is considered Filipino-owned if 60% of its stocks are owned by Filipino citizens. So, the 40% may be owned by the alien.

In fact, one foreigner may even become the sole holder of the bank account of that corporation, of course, provided that he has proper Philippine Visa status and other pertinent documents. Through this system, the foreigner is allowed full control over the assets including the accounts and real properties of the corporation.

Another way is if you are married to a Filipino citizen you can own land together as conjugal property. There are many risks involved with this way such as with a dissolution of the marriage the Filipino citizen gains full control of the property. If the foreigner dies his heirs cannot inherit it from him unless they are Philippine citizens.

If you are thinking of investing in real estate in the Philippines, you have your work cut out for you. There are no organizations that specifically deal with real estate for expats but members of expat groups can steer you to reputable real estate agents. ●



Samuel West Stewart
(American)
SRRV Holder

Philippines among the Top Retirement Havens

The Philippine Retirement Authority (PRA) is a government agency attached to the Department of Tourism mandated to attract foreign nationals and former Filipino citizens to retire, invest and reside in the Philippines. PRA's core product is the Special Resident Retiree's Visa (SRRV), a non-immigrant, multiple-entry, indefinite-stay visa.

SPECIAL RESIDENT RETIREE'S VISA OPTIONS

SRRV CLASSIC

For active / healthy principal retirees who would opt to use their Visa deposit of US\$10,000.00 for with pension / US\$20,000.00 for without pension (50 years old & above) or US\$50,000.00 (35 to 49 years old) to purchase condominium units or use for long term lease of house and lot

SRRV SMILE

For active / healthy principal retirees, 35 years old and above, who must maintain their Visa deposit of US\$20,000.00 in a PRA designated bank

SRRV HUMAN TOUCH

For ailing principal retirees, 35 years old and above, who are shown to have medical/clinical needs. Under this option, the retiree only needs to have a Visa deposit of US\$10,000.00, a monthly pension of at least US\$1,500.00 and a Health Insurance Policy

SRRV COURTESY

For former Filipinos (35 years old & above), and foreign nationals (50 years old & above) who have served in the Philippines as diplomats, ambassadors, officers/staff of international organizations. The visa deposit is only US\$1,500.00



Thomas Alexander Macdonald
SRRV Holder



Mr. & Mrs. Paul Green
SRRV Holders



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Philip Terrell (American)
SRRV Holder

7 Ways, 7 Places in a Jiff

Travel editor Roel Hoang Manipon rounds up the best quick getaways near Manila

If you ever feel the itch to venture out of the city but have limited time or budget, there are several places within reach. Metro Manila is surrounded by several provinces and most of them offer things to pique the varied interests of urbanites in need of a quick travel fix, a respite from the humdrum, instant family outing or just a curious peek at the outskirts.

1. Savor heritage and history in Taal, Batangas.

About two hours away, south of Metro Manila is Taal, a quiet town frozen in time, where lies a smattering of ancestral houses, mostly the Filipino *bahay na bato*. Many are well-preserved, some of them converted into museums, bed and breakfast places, art galleries and even a spa. Taal is admirable for the number of historical landmarks, homes of heroic figures. Notable are the home of Marcela Marino de Agoncillo, the sewer of the first Philippine flag, and the home of Leon Apacible, where the national hero Jose Rizal met with other revolutionaries. At the highest point in town is the imposing Basilica of St. Martin of Tours. Try *empanada*, one of the most delicious in the country, at the market or buy a barong Tagalog, which the town is known



Photo by Walter C. Villa



LOCAL COLOR. (Clockwise) A house made of colorful rice chips in Lucban, Quezon during Pahiyas Festival; Majayjay church in Laguna; and view of Taal Lake and Taal Volcano from Taal Vista.

Photo by Walter C. Villa

for as well as embroidery and the local fan knife, *balisong*. Stay at Villa Tortuga, an ancestral house converted into a bed-and-breakfast place, where you can enjoy native and turn-of-the-century dishes and have your photo taken wearing Spanish-era costumes.

2. Beach-bum in Puerto Galera, Oriental Mindoro.

Accessible by a two-hour bus ride to the Batangas Pier plus another hour-and-a-half-boat ride, the resort town of Puerto Galera in Oriental Mindoro is perhaps the most popular nearest destination for beach-bummers with a predilection for white sand. It has an irregular coastline, thus having many coves, some of them harbouring white-sand beaches. The most popular among the locals is White Beach, with its huddles of inexpensive resorts and rooms to stay in. On the other hand, Sabang Beach, frequented by foreigners, has over 140 places of accommodation of every type. Puerto Galera is famous for 30 dive spots like the three canyons, Shark Cave, several ship wrecks and walls, and Hibo Reef where you will find reef sharks and the best corals in the country. Non-divers can enjoy many water activities such as snorkelling, jet-skiing, wakeboarding, banana boat ride, parasailing, kayaking, windsurfing, and many more. You can also hire a boat to explore other parts of the coast or go to deserted beaches for picnics. At night, you can party at a number of bars, especially in Sabang.

3. Join the festivals in Quezon.

Filipino hospitality is best displayed in fiestas, where visitors are enjoined to partake of feasts. In recent years, these fiestas transformed into festivals, becoming spectacles and attracting tourists and revelers. May is replete with celebrations all over the country. Head south to the province of Quezon where the tranquil town of Lucban bursts with colors during the Pahiyas Festival on May 15. Houses are resplendently decorated with kiping and fruits of harvest in honor of patron Saint Isidore the Laborer. Other towns also

honor Saint Isidore with their own festivals such as Tayabas (Mayohan Festival), Sariaya (Agawan Festival) and Gumaca (Araña't Baluarte Festival).

4. Church-hop in Laguna.

Being a predominantly Roman Catholic country, churches form the bulk of the Philippines' heritage structures. The province of Laguna, just south of Metro Manila, has centuries-old, interesting churches for *visita iglesia* or heritage tour. You can go from one town to another to marvel at the awe-inspiring and august monuments of faith. Notable ones are the Church of Saint John the Baptist in Liliw; the Church of Saint Bartholomew the Apostle in Nagcarlan; the Church

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Photo by Roel Manipon

Pack Smart

Anna Gamboa tells us why smart, bag-savvy and compact travel is the way to go

In an age of budget travel, slashed airfares often spell trouble for those used to the luxury of checked-in baggage. With the mandatory 7kg weight limit on items, and the requisite volume assigned per passenger, how do compulsive overpackers become smart enough to pack light? Most of the time, airlines will allow the use of a medium-sized backpack, which is often considered a personal bag, allowing one to bring gadgets and other items that couldn't fit in the original carry-on. However, with the correct technique, perfected after a little trial and error, it's possible to pack two weeks' worth of necessities. Here are few tips:

Choose the right bag for you. Visit travel shops and examine bags to get a good idea of the capacity and dimensions of what's on sale. This is also handy when you do comparison shopping online. Research about the pros and cons about these items, and pick the bag whose price points and features you're most satisfied with. With the amount of walking done at various airports nowadays, wheels are a standard feature on most carry-on bags. If you're more comfortable with backpacks, choose one with comfortable straps and allows you to pack efficiently.

Invest in a packing cube, compressor, or large resealable bags. These allow you to cram a lot of things into a tiny space, provided you roll most of your clothes. Sturdy resealable bags are worth the extra expense (you don't want the cheaper ones breaking when you're on the road), since the best way to pack your clothes using them will be to put your weight on the bag to let the air out as you zip the bag closed. If you buy articles of clothing that can be compactly stored by themselves (ex. jackets), half the battle is won.

Roll, don't fold. Almost any item of clothing that can be rolled compactly and stored in a packing cube or bag will take up less space than a folded item. If you must bring folded items,



Photo from Shutterstock.com

these should be at the outer layers of the entire kit you're packing, to minimize creases and wrinkles.

Plan your wardrobe. Ensure that you'll have outfits that don't clash, and will match the footwear you're bringing along. If you don't really care about this fact, all bets are off. Multi-purpose articles of clothing are great when travelling—the pants which can convert to shorts or a jacket that can become a vest is worth investing in, depending on your destination. Scarves can be used as sarongs or be improvised as a stylish ladies' top. Quick-dry clothing is best for travel. Outdoor or sports apparel brands are your best bet. Their clothes are often designed to be lightweight and dry in less than a few hours after light washing. Jeans will be a good option only if you know how much wear you can get out of them without washing. Layering is a technique employed by many savvy travelers who maximize the use out of the minimum items packed.

Make use of your footwear. The space inside your shoes can hold your rolled-up socks or underwear (wrap them in plastic if you want). Folding shoes for ladies is a great investment, and a good way to rotate footwear, apart from stylish sandals and sneakers that will pass the scrutiny of strict restaurant or hotel managers.

Invest in refillable bottles for your favorite shampoo and conditioner in the appropriate sizes (and put them in a transparent resealable bag), if you think you can't buy them while travelling. Or just buy the sachets. If you're fairly confident about having a complete set of toiletry at your destination, just bring along a tiny sachet of shampoo (for emergency washing, as a liquid detergent it does the job better and faster than regular hotel soap). ●

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