

# Republic of the Philippines



The **Republic of the Philippines** is an archipelago in Southeast Asia consisting of 7,107 islands located between the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea, east of Vietnam, and north of Sabah and Borneo. The Philippines is the world's 12th most populous country, with a population of about 96 million people. Its national economy is the 47th largest in the world, with an estimated 2008

gross domestic product of over US\$ 168.6 billion. There are more than 11 million overseas Filipinos worldwide, about 11% of the total population of the Philippines. Over a hundred ethnic groups, a mixture of foreign influences and a fusion of culture and arts have created the uniqueness of the Philippines.

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## History

Several thousand years ago, the first settlers in the Philippines crossed shallow seas and land bridges from the Asian mainland to arrive in this group of islands. Several thousand years later, they were then followed by Austronesian settlers travelling the same route as the Negritos but this time over sea. After settling the islands, they traveled further and settled the islands of Indonesia, Malaysia, as well as the whole Pacific. The early Austronesians of the Philippines simultaneously traded with each other as well as with the Chinese, Japanese, Okinawans, Indians, Thais, Arabs and other Austronesians of present-day Malaysia and Indonesia. An

interesting mix of cultures developed in the islands, and a writing system as well as a social structure developed quickly. Hinduism and Buddhism was introduced by traders from India, Sumatra, and Java. These later Arab, Malay, and Javanese traders converted the natives, mainly in the island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago to Islam. When the explorer Ferdinand Magellan set foot on Philippine soil in 1521, the Philippines was predominantly Hindu and Buddhist with some Muslim inhabitants mainly in the southern part of the country. Magellan was Portuguese but it was a Spanish expedition which he led to the islands, which were eventually claimed by Spain as its colony. The Philippines was named for Crown Prince Philip II of Spain and most of the natives converted to Catholicism. The Muslims in the south and various animistic mountain tribes, however, resisted Spanish conquest and Catholic conversion.

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 presence remained until World War II when Japan invaded the Philippines. The Japanese occupation lasted from 1941 to 1945 when Gen. Douglas MacArthur fulfilled his promise and liberated the country from the Japanese.

In 1946, the Philippines was granted full independence by the U.S., although they maintained a military presence in the country through the

Subic Naval Base in Zambales and Clark Air Base in Angeles City. These facilities were ultimately returned to the Philippines in the early 1990's.

Up until the 1960s, the Philippines was second only to Japan in terms of development within the region. Several decades of corrupt rule by Ferdinand Marcos plunged the country into debt and the Philippines ultimately became known as the sick man of Asia. Poverty was widespread and infrastructure for development was severely lacking. In 1986, the People Power uprising finally overthrew the Marcos government and he was replaced by Cory Aquino, widow of slain opposition leader, Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, Jr.

A couple of decades more have passed and somehow the Philippines are still lagging in comparison to its South East Asian neighbors Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Development is still slow but the country is at least moving in the right direction in recent times.



## Economic Climate

It was once expected that the Philippines would be the economic powerhouse of Asia, but instead it became one of its poorest countries. After years of political corruption and neglect, there are, however, some tentative signs of improvement in the Philippine economy.

Predominantly agricultural, the Philippine economy has grown in the manufacturing sector since the 1960s . During the mid-90s, 46 percent of the work force was comprised of those in agriculture, fishing and forestry . These areas also contributed over 20 percent to the GDP. The service industry comprised almost 40 percent with manufacturing, construction, and mining employing 15 percent .

The main commercial crops during the mid-90s were bananas, pineapples, and copra, with the important subsistence crops being corn, rice, sweet potatoes, and cassava . Other commercial crops were papayas, oranges, sugarcane, and mangoes.

Deforestation has become a problem in the Philippines due to extensive logging of hardwood trees . In an effort to curb this trend, the government banned the exportation of hardwood logs during the 1980s . In spite of this, lumber products are still a major (legal) export.

During 1996, 23 percent of the GDP was a result of manufacturing contributions—with nondurable goods and textiles, processed food, and

tobacco products comprising the largest output percentages . Also making notable increases were durable goods such as furniture, electric items, and equipment (non-electrical).

Following through on its program of economic reforms, the government will try to ensure continued growth and provide an environment for foreign investments . The Philippines tends to spend much more on imports than exports and is trading partners with several countries—with the main countries being the United States, Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan . These countries imported items such as petroleum, metals, chemicals, food items, textiles and transportation equipment . The Philippines' main exports were fish, textiles, coconut items, and electronic (electrical) items.

## Geography

The Philippine Islands are an archipelago of over 7,000 islands lying about 500 mi (805 km) off the southeast coast of Asia. The overall land area is comparable to that of Arizona. Only about 7% of the islands are larger than one square mile, and only one-third have names. The largest are Luzon in the north (40,420 sq mi; 104,687 sq km), Mindanao in the south (36,537 sq mi; 94,631 sq km), and Samar (5,124 sq mi; 13,271 sq km). The islands are of volcanic origin, with the larger ones crossed by mountain ranges. The highest peak is Mount Apo (9,690 ft; 2,954 m) on Mindanao.

There are a total of 79 provinces in the Philippines that can be divided among three main island groups:

#### Regions of the Philippines

**Luzon** (Luzon, Mindoro, Marinduque, Masbate) The northernmost island group, center of government, history and economy, and home to the capital

**Visayas** (Palawan, Negros, Cebu, Bohol, Leyte) The central island group, heart of the country's antiquity, nature, and biodiversity

**Mindanao** (Mindanao, Basilan) The southernmost island group, which showcases the Philippines' indigenous and rich cultures



## Climate

The Philippines has two seasons: dry and wet. Generally, the dry season is from November to May and the wet season is from June to September, though weather patterns have become much less predictable. By far the hottest month in lowland regions is May, when temperatures hover as high as 38°C. The cooler months are December and January, but unless you're high in the mountains, 70% to 85% humidity levels tend to cancel out these 'low'

25°C temperatures. Rainfall typically comes in sudden, heavy bursts, and flash flooding is now more common than it should be due to widespread deforestation and soil erosion.

Each year, an average of 20 typhoons, known as *bagyo*, whip across the Philippines. Striking mainly in Luzon and the Visayas, they bring heavy rains and strong winds and cause millions of dollars worth of damage. Although typhoons can occur at any time, they occur most often in the wet season, from June to September.

## People

Philippines has a whopping population estimated at 96 million. From its long history of Western occupation, 300 years by the Spaniards and 30 years by the Americans, its people have evolved as a unique blend of east and west in both appearance and culture. Filipinos are largely Malay in terms of ethnic origin. However, many, particularly in the cities of Luzon and the Visayas, have heavy Chinese, Spanish, and American admixtures, whereas those living in the provinces are mostly of pure Austronesian origin. Many Muslims in Mindanao have Arab, Indian and Chinese admixtures. The four largest foreign minorities in the country are as follows: Chinese, Koreans, Indian, and the Japanese. Also of significance are the Americans, Indonesians, and Arabs. Pure Spaniards and other Europeans form a very small proportion in the country's population.

Needless to say, the Filipino trait is a confluence of many cultures put together. Filipinos are famous for the *bayanihan*, or spirit of kinship, and camaraderie taken from Malay forefathers. They observe very close family ties which is said to have been passed on by the Chinese. Religiosity comes from the Spaniards who were responsible for spreading the Christian faith across the archipelago. The Spaniards introduced Christianity (the Roman Catholic faith) and succeeded in converting the overwhelming majority of Filipinos. At least 83% of the total population belongs to the Roman Catholic faith.

The genuine and pure expression of hospitality is an inherent trait in Filipinos. This is especially true in the countryside, where people may appear shy at first, but they have generous spirits, especially 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.

The American occupation was responsible for teaching the Filipino people the English language. While the official language is Filipino (which many incorrectly equate with Tagalog), 76-78 languages and 170 dialects exist in this archipelago, English is still the second most widely spoken language in the country.

The geographical and cultural grouping of Filipinos is defined by region, where each group has a set of distinct traits and dialects—the

sturdy and frugal Ilocanos of the north, the industrious Tagalogs of the central plains, the loving and sweet Visayans from the central islands, and the colorful tribesmen and religious Moslems of Mindanao. Tribal communities or minorities are likewise scattered across the archipelago.

Philippine culture, compared to the rest of Asia, is quite Hispanic and Westernized at surface level. But still, Filipinos are essentially Southeast Asians, and many indigenous and pre-Hispanic attitudes and ways of thinking are still noticeable underneath a seemingly Westernized veneer. Muslim Filipinos and indigenous groups, who have retained a fully Malayo-Polynesian culture unaffected by Spanish influence, are also visible in cities like Manila, Baguio, Davao, and Cebu, and can remind a visitor of the amazing diversity and multiculturalism present in the country.

## Religion

The Philippines is not only the largest Christian country in Asia, it is the world's third largest Catholic nation. The Catholic faith remains the single biggest legacy of three hundred years of Spanish colonial rule. Catholicism is still taken quite seriously in the Philippines. The biggest religious minority are Muslim Filipinos who primarily live in Mindanao and Sulu, but also increasingly in cities such as Manila, Baguio, and Cebu in the north and central parts of the country. They account for around 5% of the

population. Indian Filipinos, Chinese Filipinos, and Japanese Filipinos are mostly Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Shinto, and Taoist, which all accounts for three percent of the population of the Philippines.



## Customs and Etiquette

Like many of its neighboring countries, The Philippines is a society based around core family values. Extended family is closely looked after, and many sponsors and family friends are also considered to be part of this important extended family. This is a foremost consideration when meeting a group of Filipinos, as you are expected to greet the most elderly or senior person present first. It is generally accepted that you only use first names when invited to do so; otherwise the standard protocol for meeting is to use honorific, academic, or professional titles,

followed by their surname. A handshake and smile are the most common form of greeting between individuals—hugs and kisses are reserved mainly for female friends.

*Hiya* is the term Filipinos use to describe the concept of shame. In some respects it is similar to the concepts of honor and 'saving face'. This principle is a fundamental aspect of culture in the Philippines, and forms the basis of most etiquette. Shame can be brought upon other people, as well as upon oneself. Public displays of criticism, shouting at or being overly emotive towards someone are all examples of behavior that is thought to be shameful. Filipinos also take great pride in the way they dress—you should always make an effort to dress well for any occasion, as well taking care of your appearance on a day-to-day basis. For this reason, when visiting the Philippines, if you have an issue that you need to take up with a Filipino individual, it should always be done quietly, and in private if possible. However angry or annoyed you might feel, you should always retain a calm exterior—shouting and aggressive behavior is seen to be very bad etiquette and will not help your situation at all.

**Dining:** When eating out in the Philippines, try to arrive at the restaurant at the agreed time. If you are eating in a Filipino home, you can arrive around 15 minutes to half an hour later than the arranged time, but any later might be considered rude. As always, it is considered good etiquette to dress well for dinner. If invited into a Filipino home

for dinner, you should bring with you a small gift as a token of your appreciation. Sweets and flowers are always well-received gifts. As with dressing, appearances are important, so you should also make a good solid effort with the wrapping of the gift!

It is very important that you remember not to refer to a host's wife as a hostess. This is because in Philippine English, the word hostess actually means prostitute—so one can imagine how badly this would go down!

The most common eating utensils are a fork and spoon. It is generally expected that you hold the fork in your left hand, as it is used to transfer food into your spoon in the right hand. Remember though, you should not begin eating until your host invites you to do so. Tucking in beforehand would be thought of as greedy and impatient. After the meal you should take your time with your fellow guests—don't be tempted to slip away from the table too early. It is thought to be good etiquette to thank your hosts for the dinner in person, as well as sending a follow-up thank you card.

In general, Filipino culture is similar in many ways to Western culture. However, as you'd expect, Filipino society has been largely influenced by its geographic location—namely the intermingling of aspects of Eastern philosophy into its cultural etiquette. As long as you abide by these basic aforementioned rules of etiquette, you should find that your time spent in the Philippines will

prove to be extremely enjoyable and memorable.

## Other Information

**Time:** The Philippines are +8 hours GMT.

**Dialing Code** -The country code for the Philippines is 63. The area code for Metro Manila is 2.

**Transportation:** In spite of the mountainous terrain, approximately 14 percent of the 158,810 kilometers (98,110 miles) of roads in the Philippines are paved. Buses, jeepneys, taxis, and motorcycles are available when getting around the major cities, and towns. Train service is provided by the Strong Republic Transit System, which unified the three main railway networks that provide service of different areas of Metro Manila, and parts of Luzon, that includes the Manila Light Rail Transit System (LRT), the Manila Metro Rail Transit System (MRT), and the Philippine National Railways (PNR).



Seaports can be found throughout the Philippine Islands. The busiest seaports are Manila, Cebu, Iloilo, Davao, Cagayan de Oro, and Zamboanga, which are parts of the

3,219 kilometers of waterways, and seaports. In 2003, the 919-kilometer Strong Republic Nautical Highway (SRNH) was established, and this is an integrated set of highway segments, and ferry routes covering 17 cities all over the Philippines.

There are 262 airports in the Philippines, 75 of which have runways. The Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA) is the main airport of the Philippines. Other important airports include the Diosdado Macapagal International Airport, Mactan-Cebu International Airport, and Francisco Bangoy International Airport. The Philippine Airlines, Asia's first commercial airline, and Cebu Pacific, the Philippine's leading domestic airline, are the major airlines serving most domestic, and international destinations.

In Manila, Cebu City, Davao, and Baguio, jeepneys are important for **city transport**, with frequent services between important locations in each city. In the provinces jeepneys connect isolated barrios to nearby towns and towns to cities, but they might run only two or three times a day, depending on demand, the weather and the mood of the driver. There are absolutely no timetables.

Not unlike jeepneys in the way they operate, **FX taxis** are air-conditioned Toyota FX Tamaraw vans, with signs in the window indicating their destination. They made their debut in Manila in the late 90s, and now operate in other cities and on some popular intercity routes. However,

routes are often not set, so it takes a little local knowledge to know where to catch the right vehicle. The vans can be a little claustrophobic—the driver won't even think about moving until he's got ten people on board, three more than the vehicle is designed for.

**Money:** The unit of currency in the Philippines is the peso (P) and it is divided into 100 centavos (c). Banknotes come in denominations of 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, 1000 and 2000 pesos. Coins are in 10c and 25c pieces, and P1, P5 and P10. Particularly in the big cities, ATMs operate 24 hours daily, and can be found in department stores, supermarkets, and shopping malls, in addition to banks.

Many shops, restaurants, hotels, and resorts accept payment by plastic, and credit-card cash advances are possible in larger towns and cities. In small towns and on islands rarely visited, there are often no provisions for credit cards. Also note that some establishments will try to add (at times surreptitiously) a surcharge to your bill when you pay with a credit card, on the grounds that they themselves have to pay a surcharge to the credit-card company. It's all up to you whether to accept this rather irritating practice or not.

Moneychangers are usually easy to find in the commercial centers of most cities; some department stores and shopping malls also have moneychangers on the premises. Moneychangers usually offer the best rates, but they are also notorious for all manner of short-

change scams and rip-offs. Because of the risk of rip-offs, it's best to use moneychangers selectively. If possible, change your cash or travelers checks at a bank, hotel, or resort, even if the rate is usually lower than at a moneychanger.



## Health

Drink the readily available bottled water. *Buko* (young coconut) juice is also safe if they have not added local ice to it. Be wary also of *buko* juice vendors, some just add sugar to water. Buy and eat fruit that has not already been cut up. Cooked food from a *karenderia* (outdoor canteen) is okay if there is a fire under the pots and the food has been kept hot. Bottled water is best purchased from within stores and sheltered eateries. Bottled waters sold outside (by the roads) are more than likely used bottles filled with tap water, sealed then cooled.

The CDC advises that risk of malaria exists in areas below 600 meters, except for the provinces of Aklan, Biliran, Bohol, Camiguin, Capiz, Catanduanes, Cebu, Guimaras, Iloilo, Leyte, Masbate, northern Samar, Sequijor, and metropolitan Manila. Chloroquine is no longer a recommended malaria preventative for anywhere in the Philippines. In general malaria is not common in the Philippines compared to Africa and the rest of mainland Southeast Asia. About half of the 40,000 cases reported annually are in a couple of discrete locations.

Also please note that because tuberculosis is very common in the countryside, it is advisable not to stay in certain villages in areas you are not familiar with for long periods. If someone coughs or looks weak, it is highly advisable to avoid contact with that person.

Bring anti-diarrheal drugs with you, as unsanitary conditions present a high risk for traveler's diarrhea.



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