

# Around Manila



After the urban joys of Manila have exhausted you – or your lungs – you'll probably be more than ready for a chance to get out of the city and experience something more natural. Fortunately you can do this quite easily, within a couple of hours you can get to the relatively unpolluted waters of the coasts outside Manila. The south has sharply varied terrain, with scores of mountains, volcanoes and craggy inlets, so just touring around is pretty interesting. Nasugbu is a popular beach escape for locals, while the coast around Anilao is dotted with excellent diving resorts for all budgets. The hilltop town of Tagaytay has fine views down into the volcanic home of Lake Taal, and Talisay is a pleasant refuge on the lake itself. Further east, Lucban is the best of several hill towns that have misty and most-appealing atmospheres. Paganjan lures in scores of day-trippers with its canoe ride to Magdapio Falls.

Going north from Manila, you pass through vast stretches of featureless flatlands, which are home to rice and cane fields interspersed with a growing number of housing developments as the capital spreads ever north. As Mt Arayat and the volcanically active Mt Pinatubo come into view, the land becomes more rolling and textured. San Fernando and Angeles are busy provincial towns; the latter is also infamous as the home of the nation's sex industry. The Bataan Peninsula remains well known as the site of WWII's notorious Death March, but is also home to the Subic Bay Freeport Zone, a struggling area centred on the decaying bones of a once-huge US naval base. The peninsula has many opportunities for water sports such as diving; the waters are well removed from the dubious conditions of Manila Bay.

Finally, Corregidor remains a lone sentinel at the bay mouth, though its scores of day-trippers are less likely to go for its WWII history than to enjoy the escape from Manila.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Diving the clear waters of **Anilao** (p123)
- Savouring the pleasures – both visual and visceral – of **Tagaytay** (p120)
- Relaxing to the sound of lapping Lake Taal in **Talisay** (p122)
- Exploring the lush hills surrounding intriguing **Lucban** (p128)
- Escaping Manila to historic **Corregidor** (opposite)
- Trekking to volcanic drama on **Mt Pinatubo** (p134)
- Plunging into the wreck-strewn waters of Bataan Peninsula's **Subic Bay** (p131)



## Getting There & Away

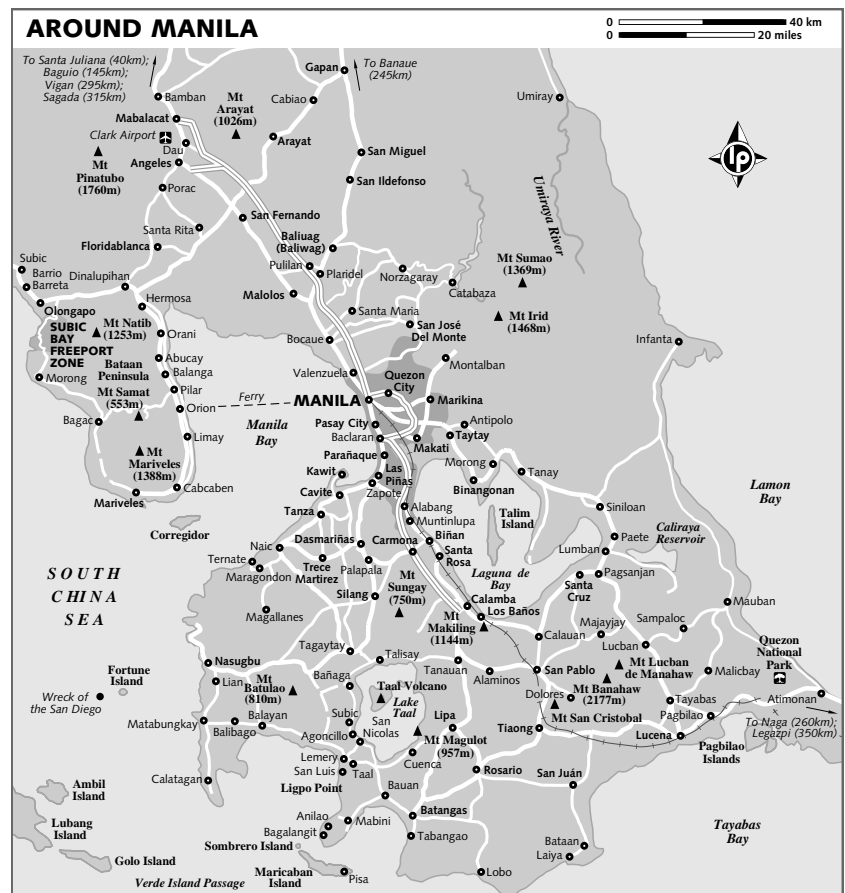
None of the places in this chapter are more than four hours from Manila by road – most of the time. On weekends, when everyone else wants to escape the city too, travel times are longer; almost double on Friday nights heading out of Manila and Sunday nights heading back. At any time, the North and South Luzon Expressways can help you leave the seemingly endless sprawl. There are many bus services to most places in this chapter.

## CORREGIDOR

The island of Corregidor (Corrector), 48km west of Manila, is a popular day trip from

the capital. In the decades after WWII, many of the visitors were history buffs and veterans, but now most people going out to the rock are locals who enjoy the ferry ride, the adventure of exploring the island and savouring the sweeping views.

The Spanish were the first to exploit Corregidor as the ideal first line of defence against trespassers. It was the scene of fierce fighting during WWII, and became the last bastion of resistance by American forces during the Japanese invasion of Luzon in 1941. General Douglas MacArthur holed up here until March 1942, when he fled to Australia. His successor, General Jonathan Wainwright, finally surrendered to the Japanese in May 1942. Huge numbers of American



and Filipino prisoners of war died on the Bataan Death March from Mariveles to the concentration camp in Tarlac.

Corregidor was occupied by the Japanese until January 1945, when MacArthur returned. The second battle for the island was no less bloody than the first, and thousands died.

## INFORMATION

**Corregidor Foundation** (Map pp80-1; ☎ 02-525 3420/9; Room 212, Dept of Tourism Bldg, Rizal Park, Manila; ⌚ 8.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) Handles general enquiries about Corregidor, although you may get better results by perusing the foundation's good collection of books and other material on your own.

**Sun Cruises** (Map p84; ☎ 02-831 8140; www.corregidorphilippines.com; CCP Complex jetty, Manila) Is the best source of information for visits to Corregidor; it also runs day trips to the island.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

There are, as you'd expect, numerous war monuments on the island. Significant sights include **General MacArthur's HQ**, the mile-long barracks, the **gun batteries** and the **Spanish lighthouse**, which offers good views over Manila Bay. There is also a small **museum** (admission free).

The **Malinta Tunnel** (admission P100) is a bombproof bunker, built into the side of a hill, that was used as a hospital and last-ditch redoubt during the conflict. At times there is a sound-and-light show in case you need audio and visual cues to imagine the drama here in 1941-42. Some areas still have typewriters and other furnishings sitting untouched from that time.

The American-built **Pacific War Memorial**, at the island's highest point (210m), is a shrine to the thousands from both sides who died in the conflict. There's a symbolic metal flame and an open-topped dome that catches the sun on 6 May, the day on which the island fell. Also worthwhile is the **Japanese Cemetery**, which is understated and formal.

Easily walked trails and paths lead right around the island, which measures roughly 3km by 5km; you can usually rent bikes.

## SLEEPING & EATING

Most visitors organise accommodation on the island as part of package tours, which include tours, boat transfers from Manila

and several meals. You can book direct with **Sun Cruises** (below) or through most Manila travel agents or hotels. Prices following are for accommodation only.

**Corregidor Hostel** (dm with fan P750) Relive the barracks life in the 40-person rooms at this handsome old building, which has a well-situated café.

**Corregidor Hotel** (s/d P1800/2500; a s ) An attractive place with wood floors and fine views. The 31 rooms are fitted with traditional rattan furniture and have private bathrooms. This is where tour groups are fed lunch (mains P195, buffet P300).

**Corregidor Beach Resort** (s/d P1800/2500; a ) A somewhat sterile collection of 15 modern cottages near the beach.

**Camp site** (per person P50) This is a pretty spot in the South Beach area. There are shower facilities and a grill for cooking.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

**Sun Cruises** (Map p84; ☎ 02-831 8140; www.corregidorphilippines.com; CCP Complex jetty, Manila) has the market cornered for trips to Corregidor. Day trips cost from P1375 and include the boat rides, various entrance fees and lunch. Tours begin at 7.30am and usually return to Manila by 4pm. You can also make arrangements to stay the night. The company dispenses information from its jetty office and is the contact point for booking the accommodation.

## SOUTH OF MANILA

There is a varied range of day- and short-trip options south of Manila. Most people are impressed with Lake Taal and its lake-within-an-island. Divers find much to enjoy at Anilao, and the hill towns south of Pagsanjan, such as Luchan, have some scenic drives. For those with very limited time, nearby Las Piñas, Cavite and Calamba offer meaningful historical sites.

### LAS PIÑAS

☎ 02

The once-tiny village of Las Piñas, 20km south of Manila, has long been swallowed up by Metro Manila, but the centre has a bit of village atmosphere and many of its buildings have been restored using traditional methods.

The principal attraction here is the **bamboo organ** (☎ 825 7190, 826 7718; Quirino Ave; adult/child P20/10; ⌚ 6am-noon & 2-7pm) in the very attractive **San José Church** (Quirino Ave). The famous organ was built in 1821, during a lean period, by the Spanish priest Padre Diego Cera, who instructed bamboo to be used instead of the more expensive metal for the majority of the organ pipes. The admission price allows you to make a request to the organist, and you can wander the shady complex of churches and courtyards.

In the second week of February, organists from around the world gather here for the **Bamboo Organ Festival**.

JEEPNEYS travelling from Baclaran (in Manila) to Zapote stop at the church (P11).

## CAVITE

☎ 046 / pop 99,500

The protected harbour of Cavite, 35km southwest of Manila, was the site of the destruction of the Spanish fleet during the US invasion of Luzon in 1898. The city is now the home of the Philippine Navy and is known for its traffic jams for those who venture onto the peninsula off the main road.

The real reason for coming here is to visit **Aguinaldo House** (☎ 434 8573; admission free; ⌚ 8-11.30am & 1-5pm Tue-Sun) in the village of Kawit, 23km south of Manila. Here the revolutionary army of General Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed Philippine Independence on 12 June 1898 – a triumph soon quashed by the Americans. The house is now a shrine, and you can tour Aguinaldo's private rooms and see his much-loved bowling alley. The general died in 1964 after a very long life that included a rather distressing period of chumminess with the Japanese occupiers.

Saulog Transit, in Intramuros, has frequent buses south along the coast road (P30).

## TERNATE

☎ 046

A few resorts line the coast south of Cavite, but most suffer from being on the somewhat dubious waters of Manila Bay. Best of the lot – if you're a golfer – is **Puerto Azul Resort** (☎ 524 0027; cottages per person from P1550; a s ), which has a justifiably popular golf course set among the hills along the bay. Accommodation is in reasonable cottages on a grey-sand beach, but the pool is huge

and duffers enjoy the dirt-cheap all-you-can-drink bar specials.

## NASUGBU

☎ 046 / pop 97,300

Nasugbu has some of the most popular beaches close to Manila. The main beach in Nasugbu has dark-brown sand and is not especially idyllic; however, a few kilometres north there are some small white-sand coves and good beaches at Natipuan and Munting Buhangin.

## Sleeping & Eating

Following the road north of town will bring you to some pleasant resorts. In town, choose carefully as some places are pretty run down. Most have modest cafés.

**Maya-Maya Reef Resort** (☎ 0918 909 7170; www.mayamaya.com; cottages P2800-4500; a i s ) A large, shady resort in Natipuan, 6km north of town, Maya-Maya is the most attractive option in the area. Its 14 thatched-roof cottages sit on a quiet cove, and the café and bar have nice views of the marina. You can go diving for P3000.

**Shorebirds** (☎ 02-563 7071 in Manila; www.geocities.com/shorebirdsbeach90; r from P1900; a ) This simple place on the beach in town has clean rooms and friendly staff. There are a couple of comfortable neighbouring hotels as well.

**Alix Bayside Beach Resort** (☎ 0927 840 9845; r P1500-1800; s ) Another simple place in town, with nine fan-cooled rooms built around a large pool.

## Getting There & Around

Erjohn & Almark and Crow Transit have regular buses from Pasay City to Nasugbu (P120, two hours). The Erjohn & Almark terminal is by the park in the middle of Nasugbu; Crow has a terminal on the highway, 1km north of town.

A banca to the beaches at Natipuan and Munting Buhangin from the Wawa pier at the north end of Nasugbu will cost about P750.

## MATABUNGKAY

☎ 046

Matabungkay has a beach that is not as long as that in Nasugbu but is equally brown. The appeal here are floating picnic rafts called *balsas* (per day rental P500 to P1500) that would do Tom Sawyer proud.

Anchored over the fairly clean water, these are good bases for swimming and just kicking back. Dynamite fishing has done in the reefs locally, however.

### Sleeping & Eating

Most of the places to stay are close together on the beach.

**Lago de Oro** (☎ 0917 504 2685; www.lago-de-oro.com; r from P3500; a i s ) About 6km south of Matabungkay proper, this sprawling place includes a large lake popular with water-skiers. The beach is small but clean, and the 26 rooms are in modest two-storey buildings with shady patios. The food is excellent, and the many European visitors are kept happy with an on-site bakery.

**Greendoors Cottages** (☎ 540 3130, 0917 619 9796; r with fan/air-con from P800/2500) Run by truly lovely people, the Greendoors is situated in lush, leafy grounds. The 24 rooms are simple but large. There's a communal kitchen and the beach is out the back gate.

**Matabungkay Beach Resort & Hotel** (☎ 02-752 5252 in Manila, 0917 834 1269; www.matabungkay.net; r from P2400; s ) There's a tidy strip of beach out back and carefully coiffed grounds (although the shuffleboard court needs work) at this modest compound. The 85 rooms are comfortable and the restaurant is excellent, offering up good pizzas and tasty banana splits.

**Coral Beach Club** (☎ 0917 901 4635; www.coralbeach.ph; r P2800-3800; a s ) North of the pier, this 21-room place has nice grounds and is on a good strip of sand. The deluxe rooms are well equipped, with fridges, cable TV and large bathrooms.

### Getting There & Around

Crow Transit has buses to Lian (P110, 90 minutes), where you can get a jeepney for the final leg to Matabungkay (P20). From Nasugbu, take a jeepney to Lian, where you can pick up another. Lian also has jeepneys for Tagaytay (P50, 45 minutes).

You can take a tricycle to the beach from the Matabungkay junction on the Calatagan road (P10).

### LAKE TAAL & TAAL VOLCANO

On a clear day, Lake Taal is truly a marvel to behold. You can get superb views from Talisay and other towns that line the volcanic ridge around the lake's crater setting. Like a set of Russian *matreshka* dolls, the aptly

named Volcano Island in the middle of the lake in turn encircles its own little lake.

The entire area is part of Taal Volcano, one of the world's smallest and deadliest. It boasts over 47 craters and 35 volcanic cones. In 1977, the calm of this peaceful spot was shattered by explosive eruptions as subterranean magma tried to escape to the surface. A team of vulcanologists keeps a 24-hour vigil from the lakeside village of Talisay.

The bulk of Volcano Island emerged from the lake during the savage eruption of 1911, which claimed hundreds of lives. Over the next 66 years, eruptions sculpted and resculpted the island's appearance.

The main Taal crater is in the middle of the island (the obvious cone visible from the ridge is Binitiang Malaki, which last erupted in 1715). Within the Taal crater is a yellow sulphurous lake (itself containing a small island), which is about an hour's hike from the island's shore.

The most active crater is Mt Tabaro, on the west side, which saw dramatic lava flows in the late '60s and mid-'70s. Since then, Taal Volcano tours have become a popular activity, with several villages on the lake's shore offering boats across to the island.

### Tagaytay

☎ 046 / pop 45,300

Meandering along a ridge high above the gaping maw of Taal Volcano, Tagaytay serves up jaw-dropping roadside views that will force you to stop. This pearl of the Cavite region lies just 60km south of Manila but is everything the capital is not: cool, clean, gorgeous, relaxing and oxygenated. Chalk that up to altitude and attitude. Tagaytay sits 640m above sea level and is regularly massaged by cool breezes blowing off the South China Sea, 50km to the west.

Tagaytay is a place for short morning walks along the ridge and long afternoon siestas; a place of gardens and greenhouses; a place to sit for hours along the ridge, sipping cocktails and watching the mist tickle the multiple craters of Taal Volcano.

The town is very popular with upscale weekenders from Manila, both expat and local.

### ORIENTATION

Tagaytay occupies a narrow 20km strip of real estate that runs roughly east to west

along Tagaytay Ridge. Almost everything of interest is located just off the ridge road. A rotunda at the intersection of the road to Silang separates the eastern and western halves of town. Olivarez Plaza, just north of the rotunda, is the commercial centre. Beware of traffic jams.

### INFORMATION

There are several Internet cafés around Olivarez Plaza as well as banks and ATMs.

**Police station** (☎ 413 2002; Aguinaldo Hwy; h 24hr)

Located 1.5km west of the rotunda; is adept with tourists.

**Tagaytay City Hospital** (☎ 413 2160; Bacolod St;

h 24hr)

### SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

**People's Park in the Sky** (admission P50; h dawn-dusk), improbably perched on a towering mound of earth at Tagaytay's eastern end, was Ferdinand Marcos' unfinished summer home. It is now a theme park that offers spectacular 360-degree views of the area, as well as a healthy dose of insight into the ex-dictator's psyche. It's 7.5km east of the rotunda.

Most activities centre on the lake, island and volcano. See Talisay (p122) for details.

### SLEEPING

For a town with such a long stretch of cliffside views, Tagaytay's hotels are a disappointment. The dozens of resorts and guesthouses on the lake side of the main road have little to recommend besides the views. Save money and frustration by sleeping on the valley side.

**Sonya's Garden** (☎ 0917 532 9097; www.sonyasgarden.com; cottages per person weekday/weekend P2500/P2800; a ) This exquisite countryside B&B has elegant cottages featuring shower stalls with pebble flooring, wall-to-wall screening, and easels in case you're feeling artistic. The grounds are festooned with gazebos and exotic plants. Yoga, meditation classes and a full range of spa services are on offer. The restaurant is one of the best in the region (right). It's 2km via tricycle or jeepney from a well-marked turn-off on the main road, 13.1km west of the rotunda.

**Estancia Resort Hotel** (☎ 413 1133; d/nipa hut P2900/3200; a s ) One of the few places on the lake side that does not succumb to dilapidation, cookie-cutter cinderblock design, astronomical prices, or all three. The

bamboo nipa huts are set unobtrusively amid the jungle with balconies overlooking the lake. There are two pools. For lake views, request a room on the east side. Estancia is 1.3km east of the rotunda.

**MC Mountain Home Apartelle** (☎ 413 2232; Km 68.9 Aguinaldo Hwy, Alfonso; d P1700; a ) This mid-range hotel, 13.2km west of the rotunda, is a little way out of town but worth the trip. The rooms are small but immaculate, and have nice views of the valley and mountains to the northwest. There's a spa and guests get substantial discounts at several nearby golf courses.

**Keni Po** (☎ 413 0977; 111 Calamba Rd; d P1200; a ) This valley-side place, 3.5km east of the rotunda, is the best of the budget hotels, with small, well-kept doubles that include minibars, cable TV and shared balconies.

### EATING

Foodies know Tagaytay as a culinary mecca where the best restaurants are often booked out months in advance.

**Leslie's** (☎ 413 4271; Aguinaldo Hwy; meals P200) This Tagaytay institution is known for fried *tawili* (small fish), *karé-karé* (octail with peanut sauce), *sinigang* (tamarind soup) and other Philippine delicacies. Its large outdoor dining area overlooks the lake and is dotted with folksy open-air huts for private dining. It's 2km west of the rotunda.

**Antonio's** (☎ 0917 899 2866; Barangay Neogan; meals from P1500; h closed Mon; a ) This upscale continental restaurant offers the chance to rub elbows with politicians and oligarchs over full-course seafood meals – if you can get a reservation. Book months ahead for weekends. The décor is a mix of Filipino and Mexican, and seating areas include some lovely tables overlooking lotus ponds. Kids' menu available. The turn-off to barangay Neogan is 7.6km east of the rotunda.

**Sonya's Garden** (☎ 0917 532 9097; meals from P800) The restaurant at the famous B&B (left) serves up exquisite vegetarian dishes and other fare using ingredients from the eponymous gardens.

**Bag of Beans** (☎ 413 2724; 115 Aguinaldo Hwy; snacks P150) Dine among hanging angel trumpets, begonias and other exotic flowering plants on the garden patio of this superb bakery-restaurant specialising in English meat pies and scrumptious desserts. It's 6.5km west of the rotunda.

**DRINKING**

**Fame** (☎ 0927 817 1781; 168 Aguinaldo Hwy; a ) This live-music venue is known affectionately by locals as 'Freddy's place' because it's owned by Filipino folk-legend Freddy Aguilar, who plays at 8pm every Saturday night. It's 5km west of the rotunda.

**Geladrino's** (☎ 413 2483; Silang road; a ) Located at the rotunda, this British-owned bar-and-grill is popular with expats. It has live music on weekends.

**GETTING THERE & AROUND**

Crow Transit buses from Bacalaran (in Manila) stop in Tagaytay (with/without air-con P75/45, two hours) on the way to Nasugbu or Mendez. To return to Manila, hail Crow buses from the streetside shed at Olivarez Plaza or Mendez Crossing in town.

Several jeepneys traverse the main road from one end of town to the other and cost P5 to P8. Tricycles cost roughly P10 to P15 per kilometre.

**Talisay**

☎ 043 / pop 32,500

On the edge of Lake Taal, the small town of Talisay is centred on the junction of the road up the hill to Tagaytay and the lakefront road. It's a wonderful place to chill out right by the water. The commercial district is about 2km east of the junction; most of the simple and serene places to stay are west.

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

The big activity here is bangka trips out to Taal Volcano. There are dozens of operators vying for the attention of arriving tourists, and spotters alert the touts to tourists coming down the hill from Tagaytay. Depending on where you hire them, motorised bangka to the island cost P1000 to P1500 for the whole boat (life jackets are P15 to P30 extra).

The volcanic island offers several hikes. Easily the most popular is the trip to the main crater and its evil-looking yellow pool and island. The walk takes about an hour (or you can hire a tired old horse for P500), and although most boat trips come with a guide, you definitely don't need one. Another option is the hike to the neat cone of Binitiang Malaki.

It is possible to take more rigorous all-day treks up Mt Tabaro, an active crater that's probably the most impressive part of

the island, or up the south ridge of Taal's main crater. Only a few guides make these trips; they charge around P500, plus a bit extra for a bangka ride around to the south side of island (P2500 for up to six people).

For all the walks it's wise to bring plenty of drinking water and a hat, as the craters are hot and dusty and there's little shelter from the sun.

You can take a dip anywhere along the lake. The **Taal Lake Yacht Club** (☎ 773 0192; Barangay Santa Maria; admission P100; h 8am-5pm) has a good selection of water-sport equipment that you can hire, including small sailboats and kayaks. It's 1km east of the junction.

If you want to find out more about the volcano, the **Philippine Institute of Volcanology & Seismology** (Philvolcs; ☎ 773 0293; Barangay Buco; admission free; h 8am-5pm), 3km east of the junction, houses the monitoring station, an interesting museum and seismographs of recent events. Check out the picture of the 'lava delta'.

**SLEEPING & EATING**

Talisay has several simple yet charming lakeside retreats.

**Gloria de Castro's** (☎ 773 0138; r P500-2000; a ) At the far western end of Talisay, 5km west of the junction, Gloria de Castro's has one of the best boats to Taal (P1000). The six rooms are comfortable and all have private bathrooms; the best two rooms have views and air-con. The simple seafood dishes (P100 to P150) go great with cold beer at this friendly place.

**San Roque Beach Resort** (☎ 773 0271, 0919 310 7976; s/d P1000/1500; a ) Three kilometres east of the junction, this is a clean and relaxed place with 11 comfortable rooms. Taal boats cost P1200, and the friendly family management will happily organise out-of-town trips. There's a swimming area on the lake.

**Talisay Green Lake Resort** (☎ 773 0247; r P1500; a s ) Next to the Taal Lake Yacht Club, 1km east of the junction, this long-established resort has six good rooms with TVs and private bathrooms. Handy facilities for day-trippers (admission P90) include a swimming pool and picnic huts. Boat rental is P1500.

**GETTING THERE & AWAY**

There are regular jeepneys to Talisay from Tanauan (P22, 30 minutes), which is on the main bus route between Manila and Batan-

gas. JAM Transit passes through Tanauan on its way from Pasay City to Batangas (P75, 90 minutes). The last jeepney trip to Tanauan from Talisay leaves at 6pm. There are also jeepneys up to Tagaytay (P26, 30 minutes).

**TAAL**

Taal is a historic small town with a number of old Spanish colonial buildings. The truly massive **Basilica of St Martin de Tours** (built 1849-65) dominates Taal Park at its base. Numerous nearby shops sell the town's famous embroidery and *balisong* (butterfly knives). Some of the oodles of historic homes are open on irregular schedules; ask for information at the basilica gift shop, which is open from 9am to 6pm. The town is 3km off the main road between Batangas and Tagaytay but it is a worthy stop, especially if you have your own transport.

**ANILAO**

Anilao, 20km south of Taal on a small peninsula, is the most popular diving spot for people from Manila in the know. It has avoided the top-dollar development that has transformed other resort areas, instead maintaining a quiet seaside charm. There are dozens of dive resorts strung out along the rugged coastal road south of the village; the attractions here are all below the water and most people spend all of their time at one resort. If you're not diving, you can enjoy the sweeping views and solitude.

**Activities**

There are more than three dozen dive sites accessible from Anilao, in Balayan Bay and around the Sombrero and Maricaban Islands. In general, the further you go from shore, the more chance you have of getting a dive site to yourself. Most of the dive sites are coral gardens, making it perfect for beginners, though further from the shore there are some walls with strong currents. Lessons are readily obtainable and the waters are clear.

Resorts' diving fees tend to range from P800 to P1200 for a boat and two dives, including a dive guide; individual prices drop significantly if you dive in a group. Equipment is usually available for rent. If you're coming from Manila, you might check out the packages offered by **Diver's Network** (Map p88; ☎ 02-926 4466; www.diveph.com; 192 Morato Ave, Quezon City, Manila).

**Sleeping & Eating**

There aren't really any great places to stay in Anilao town proper (Anilao is the generic tourist name for the region); instead, resorts line the rocky, steep coast going south. Most are isolated from each other and you may face 100 or more steps getting down to the resort from the road - another reason people tend to stay put. Note that quality varies greatly from one place to the next.

Resort rates usually include meals and you can get great discounts outside weekends.

**Balai** (☎ 02-943 2808 in Manila; www.balai-resort.com; r per person P1750) Simple yet attractive, Balai has 15 rooms set in its own little cove. The design is modern and there are many decorative touches, especially in the breezy common areas. The fresh and tasty dinners are recommended. Located past Dive Solana, this is one of the furthest places from town.

**Planet Dive** (☎ 0918 929 9342, 02-410 6193 in Manila; www.planetdive.net; cottages per person from P1700; a ) Eleven beguiling cottages cling to the hillside at this spot, the furthest south of the resorts. Some have air-con and all get good breezes off the water. There's a small beach in front. Unlike most of the other resorts, Planet Dive has instructors on site and offers certification programs for divers. Fees vary depending on the desired level of instruction.

**Aquareef Club** (☎ 02-895 7932 in Manila; aquareefclub@pacific.net.ph; r per person from P2000; a ) There are 20 units at this well-established compound, which overlooks a small bay. Units are comfortable and the common

**THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE**

**Dive Solana** (☎ 0917 300 1974; www.dive-solana.com; s/d from US\$90/115; a ) Designed by a scion of the Ayala fortune, Solana is not only the pick of Anilao, it's the pick of South Luzon. In a jewel of a setting on the water, Solana is 270 steps down from the parking area. Once there, simple rooms are beautifully decorated with arts and crafts of the region, including embroidery, linens and furniture. It's such a throwback to the glory days of Filipino style that, as you sit on your porch overlooking the water, you fully expect to see a Pan American clipper boat set down in the calm waters beyond. The food is bounteous and complex and is served with good wine.

areas have less of a hutlike feel than some places. The resort has its own PADI dive centre with a range of courses. Numerous packages are available.

### Getting There & Away

Regular jeepneys leave from P Burgos St in Batangas (P25, 30 to 60 minutes) for the tiny cocoa-producing town of Mabini, with some continuing to Anilao town. From there, you transfer to a Sulo-bound jeepney for the ride along the coast to your resort (P10).

### BATANGAS

☎ 043 / pop 251,000

The capital of Batangas province boasts a busy port and numerous chemical plants and oil refineries; as such, the town itself isn't particularly attractive. Most people only come here to pick up a boat to the beach island of Mindoro or to Romblon Island in the Visayas.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Mac-Ro Lodge** (☎ 772 1038; cnr P Panganiban & Lieutenant Colonel Atienza Sts; r with/without air-con P1200/800) This modern place has clean, comfortable rooms (some available by the hour) and is the nicest choice locally. The cheapest rooms, with their windowless charms, will appeal to spelunkers. The hotel is three streets north of P Burgos St.

**Travellers Inn** (☎ 723 6021; JP Rizal Ave Extension; r P575-775; a ) The best of the cheap hotels, it has 25 very basic rooms and is 500m from the ferry terminal. Deluxe rooms add cable to your TV experience.

**Avenue Pension House I** (☎ 300 1964, 150 JP Rizal Ave; r with fan P250, with air-con P330) Three streets north of P Burgos St, this is a short-stay place with private bathrooms that is close to the centre and has passable rooms.

Cheap little food joints can be found nearby.

### Getting There & Away

#### BUS

ALFS and JAM Transit have buses every 15 minutes to Cubao, Buendia, Lawton and Pasay City, all in Manila (P150, 3 hours). The ALFS terminal is at the junction of Mabini and Manila Rds. JAM Transit has a terminal on the road west to Bauan – you can get here on the Bauan jeepney from P Burgos St in Batangas.

Near the JAM Transit bus terminal there are minivans for Nasugbu (P75, 1½ hours).

#### BOAT

Batangas is the main jumping-off point for the extremely popular resort town of Puerto Galera on Mindoro. There are also boats to White Beach, Sabang, Calapan, Abra de Ilog and San José (all also on Mindoro), and to Romblon, Tablas and Sibuyan Islands. Batangas pier is at the end of JP Rizal Ave, reached by the Batangas pier jeepney (P10).

All of the boat companies operating out of Batangas have desks in the terminal building and the competition is quite fierce. Touts add to the chaos and clamour; it's advisable to deal only with ticket sellers behind company desks. The terminal fee is P20, payable at the terminal counter.

#### Mindoro

Ferries and pumpboats operate until about 6pm between Batangas and Puerto Galera, Sabang and White Beach, and service is frequent. Other boats go less often to more-distant ports. Note that you can also get a combined bus-and-ferry service from Manila to Puerto Galera (see p205).

Companies that run services to Mindoro: **Father 'n' Son Lines** (☎ 092 821 3828) To Sabang (P130, one hour).

**Montenegro Shipping Lines** (☎ 723 8294) To Calapan (P130, two hours), San José (economy/deluxe P465/568, 12 hours) and Odiongan (economy/deluxe P456/546, eight hours).

**St-Kat Ferry** (☎ 0918 518 2683) To White Beach (P150, one hour).

**Super Diamond Shipping Lines** (☎ 0917 350 8121) To Puerto Galera (P180, one hour).

**SuperCat** (☎ 723 8227) To Calapan (P200, 45 minutes).

#### Romblon & Other Islands

**Montenegro Shipping Lines** (☎ 723 8294) Serves Odiongan (economy/deluxe P456/546, eight hours) on Tablas Island.

**Shipshape Shipping** (☎ 02-723 7615 in Manila) Has boats on various routes to San Agustin (P360, 10 hours) and Odiongan (P305, eight hours), both on Tablas Island, and Romblon town (P382, 11 hours).

### CALAMBA

☎ 049 / pop 29,500

Calamba, southeast of Manila on the shores of the Laguna de Bay, was the birthplace of

the Philippine national hero José Rizal, and the much-restored Spanish-colonial house where Rizal was born is now venerated as the **Rizal Shrine** (admission free; h 8am-noon & 1-5pm Tue-Sun). On display are numerous items of Rizal memorabilia.

Near the Santa Rosa exit from the South Luzon Expressway, **Enchanted Kingdom** (☎ 02-830 2111 in Manila; www.enchantedkingdom.com.ph; admission P400-500; h 10am-10pm Sat & Sun & holidays) is Luzon's most popular theme park, with a good selection of thrill rides, including Air Pterodactyl. It's open many weekdays during holiday times. Kids love it.

### LOS BAÑOS

☎ 049 / pop 84,300

A few kilometres southeast of Calamba, Los Baños trades heavily on its natural hot springs, with many resorts offering water slides, Olympic-sized pools, spas and even hotel rooms with private spas. Some have views of Laguna de Bay, with its fishers working the placid waters from huts on stilts.

### Sights & Activities

If you get tired of the water, the University of the Philippines Los Baños (UPLB) campus is the starting point for the hike up to the top of Mt Makiling (1144m), an old volcano with some impressive forest on its upper slopes.

It takes about two hours to walk the 9km from the UPLB campus to the summit. It's a beautiful walk and you'll see numerous birds amongst the dense forest, which is carpeted in moss. Look out for the cloud rat, a recently identified rodent that lives in the trees and is the size of a bread box.

The UPLB College of Forestry has a small **natural history museum** (admission P20; h 8am-5pm Mon-Sat). A bit further up the hill, the **Makiling Botanic Gardens** (admission P20, swimming pool P20; h 8am-4.30pm Mon-Sat) has a captive-breeding program for the endangered Philippine eagle and a peaceful swimming pool in the middle of the forest.

### Sleeping

There are a string of resorts on the highway towards Calamba but these tend to be industrial-sized and designed to serve day-trippers from Manila.

**Monte Vista Hot Springs Resort** (☎ 545 1259; r P1900-3800; a s ) Halfway between Calamba

and Los Baños, this is a huge place with numerous pools, spas and water slides. Day admission is P95 from Monday to Thursday, and P125 from Friday to Sunday. Rooms come with air-con and private bathrooms, and the best ones have private pools.

Better are the places in Bayan, 7km away off the National Hwy. Catch one of the buses along the highway.

**City of Springs** (☎ 536 0731; www.splashmountain.com; 147 Villegas St, Bayan; r P660-2100; a s ) Has a good main pool, a restaurant and a common area with restful lake views. Cheaper rooms are dark, but more money gets you a private pool, a spa or a view of the lake. The property is in a quiet part of town and is well maintained.

### Getting There & Around

From Manila, JAM and Tritrans buses to Santa Cruz stop in Los Baños (regular/air-con P85/105, 90 minutes).

Jeepneys run from Calamba to Los Baños (P10, 30 minutes). Jeepneys to the UPLB campus (P8) leave from the Jollibee restaurant on the National Hwy. The last trip downhill leaves at about 5pm.

### SAN PABLO

☎ 049 / pop 212,000

San Pablo, 15km east of Alaminos, is known for its seven **volcanic lakes**, which offer some pleasant walks. Closest to the centre is the appealing Sampaloc Lake. Located off Schetelig Ave, it has a paved trail around the edge that you can walk in one hour. There are several restaurants on stilts which sell tasty *tilapia* (carp), which are raised here. Across the road is the small Bunot Lake, and further north are the lakes of Calibato, Palacpaquen, Mobicap, Yambo and Pandin. At the centre of town is the looming Cathedral of St Paul the First Hermit. Parts date from the late 1700s.

The town is also the jumping-off point for hikes up the sacred slopes of Mt Banahaw (p127).

In the second week of January, San Pablo holds its **coconut festival** – a week of street dancing and celebrating that showcases the many coconut-based products for which the area is famous.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Buena's Pension House** (☎ 562 9273; Culago Ave; r P450-1700; a ) See the incongruous 'City Hotel'

### GOING COCONUTS FOR BUKO PIE

Throughout the region around San Pablo, you'll see roadside stands selling buko pie, a local delicacy. Sort of like a custard pie, the treat is laden with tender slices of fresh coconut. There's only one size sold – large – so have some friends to share it with, or plan on making some. Among the many vendors, the 50-plus outlets of Colette's are the best. You'll find them along any major road. The pies (P100) are made fresh throughout the day in each store. If your pie isn't fresh out of the oven, ask for one that is.

sign and you'll have found this clean place close to the centre. Cheap rooms are dark and fan cooled; more expensive ones have air-con and cable TV. Décor includes a nice patio and a nook for chess. Out front, there's a decent karaoke café with good food.

**Sampaloc Lake Youth Hostel** (☎ 562 3376; Doña St, Efarca Village; dm P200) Overlooking peaceful Sampaloc Lake, this four-room place is friendly and very helpful. It has steps down to the trail around the lake, and is close to a market and cafés. To get here, follow Schetelig Ave, the main road to the lakes (P30 by tricycle).

### Getting There & Around

Numerous buses from Manila, including ones run by JAM Transit, pass through San Pablo (regular/air-con P78/92, two hours) on the way to places like Lucena and points beyond. Most buses stop on Schetelig Ave, close to the cathedral.

Jepneys run from San Pablo up to Santa Cruz (P38, 45 minutes) and Los Baños (P26, 30 minutes). You can wave one down anywhere along the highway. Jeepneys to Dolores (for Kinabuhayan and Mt Banahaw) leave from the public market (P16, 20 minutes).

The lakes are all within 5km of the city and can be reached by jeepney (P30) from Schetelig Ave.

### ALAMINOS AREA

Just outside Alaminos, **Hidden Valley Springs Resort** (☎ 02-840 4112 in Manila; overnight package s/d from P5356/8225; a s ) is a jungle resort with lush tropical flora, hot springs and seven natural pools for swimming. Hordes

of day-trippers enjoy the facilities and gorge themselves on the buffet lunch of Filipino food. Overnight packages include all meals and admission to the springs. The 30 rooms vary greatly but all have varnished-wood furnishings, windows overlooking the forest or garden, and private bathrooms. Most romantic are the *casitas* (little huts).

As well as swimming in the springs, guests can hike through the forests, visit 'hidden' falls or enjoy a poolside massage and other treats. Visit during the week to avoid the crowds.

JAM Transit buses from Manila to Lucena stop in Alaminos (P70, two hours), and local buses and jeepneys provide constant services from San Pablo (P25). Tricycles link the final 5km to Hidden Valley (P120, 10 minutes).

### PAGSANJAN

☎ 049 / pop 32,600

The town of Pagsanjan (*pag-san-han*), 100km southeast of Manila, has become synonymous with the Magdapio Falls, the starting point for a popular canoe ride through the rapids of the Pagsanjan River. This is one of Luzon's major tourist attractions and boat trips along the river form a huge part of the town's income.

Some of the final scenes of Francis Ford Coppola's epic Vietnam War movie *Apocalypse Now* were filmed along this stretch of river. Unfortunately, tourists can still experience what resembles the fate of the water buffalo in the final scenes as they are led to what seems like slaughter: touts mob new arrivals to town and offers of boat trips are aggressive.

In an effort to insulate tourists from the rapacious demands of *bancero* (boatmen) there are official rates of P580 per person, plus P50 for a life jacket (mandatory) and P30 for a cushion (most places just offer a nondiscounted 'package' of all three for P660). However, *bancero* still strongly suggest that you give them a tip; P200 should suffice. Booking a trip through your accommodation is still the best way to ensure a hassle-free journey.

For the ride up to the falls, two *bancero* paddle the canoe for 1½ hours against the powerful flow of the river, through a dramatic gorge hemmed by towering cliffs and vegetation. At the top, the *bancero* will take

you under the 10m-high falls on a bamboo raft for an additional P50. From here, you let the water do the work. The trip downstream is fast and exhilarating.

The height of the wet season (August to September) is the best time to ride the rapids. At any time of year it's best to avoid weekends, as half of Manila seems to descend on Pagsanjan. You should bring a plastic bag for your camera, and prepare to get very wet.

### Sleeping

**La Vista** (☎ 0906 833 7153; Garcia St; r P1000-2000; a ) This new place is right on the river in town. It has four very clean rooms, and the rooftop penthouse sleeps four. The deck has fabulous views you can enjoy over a beer.

**Willy Flores Guesthouse** (☎ 500 8203; 821 Garcia St; r with fan P300) Behind the municipal hall, this is a spotless and friendly family-run place with three rooms, one with private toilet. It's a few houses in from the water.

On the highway towards Lucban, there are several large resorts with great views overlooking the river. However, they also

suffer from a certain charmless institutional quality.

**La Corona de Pagsanjan Resort** (☎ 02-524 2631 in Manila; pagsanjan@hotelacorona.com; d P2200; a s ) This large place has 33 decent rooms, which unfortunately don't have views of the river. But it's the best bet of the big places and it has three pools, a restaurant and well-maintained grounds.

### Eating

**83 Gallery Cafe & Restaurant** (☎ 808 4967; 83 Rizal St; meals P150-300; h 9am-9pm; a ) This stylish little place is a few cuts above the norm and attracts day-trippers with its interesting menu of salads, pizzas and other treats, some seasoned with homegrown herbs. The dining room is cute and the garden has local works of art. It's a few minutes' walk from the centre of town.

**Aling Taleng's Halo Halo** (☎ 0916 309 3683; 169 General Luna St; halu-halo P30; h 9am-6pm) What's better after a hot day on the river than the national icy treat? This simple place right by the bridge has been making dreams come true for decades.

### HIKING MT BANAHAW

Descriptions of the vast dormant volcanic cone of Mt Banahaw, 15km east of San Pablo, are almost always accompanied by the term 'mystic'. The Rizalistas, a religious sect, gather in the Banahaw crater to wash in the 'River Jordan' and pray for the rebirth of José Rizal, and every Easter, up to 30,000 devotees begin the ascent of the holy mountain.

Mt Banahaw offers some of the most impressive hiking in southern Luzon. The weather is an important consideration, however, as the awe-inspiring views from the rim down into the 600m-deep crater can vanish entirely in low cloud. Even in the dry season, cloud can suddenly rise up from the crater bottom, adding to the spooky atmosphere. Some locals are convinced they've seen UFOs.

The trek up to the crater rim (2177m) and down into the crater, returning via the canyon on the western side of the volcano, takes two to three days, but the crater rim can be visited as an overnight trek. The more popular entry point is from the eastern (Dolores) side, up either Via Christalino, the short but steep path with great waterfalls, or Via Tatlongtang, the longer but easier path. Consult weather forecasts before the treacherous climb, and don't camp in the crater as flash flooding can occur. The path is well worn, but branching trails make guides necessary.

The starting point is the village of Kinabuhayan, near Dolores, where you check in at the barangay hall and can inquire about a guide. Supplies are best bought in San Pablo. You will need to bring your own camping gear, but water is in good supply on the mountain. Note that at various times the government closes the mountain to trekkers in order to protect it. For info, check with the **Department of Environment & Natural Resources** (☎ 02-928 1178 in Manila; www.denr.gov.ph).

Jepneys to Dolores leave from the public market in San Pablo every few minutes during daylight hours. From Dolores you can pick up another jeepney to Kinabuhayan.

**Power Up** (☎ 0918 902 0754, 02-631 4675), a climbing outfit based in Manila, can design and lead hikes of the mountains, with fees starting at P1500 per person.

**Dura-Fe** (General Taño St; meals P40-150; 7am-8pm) Good Filipino food in an open-air setting and low prices.

### Getting There & Away

There are no direct buses to Pagsanjan, but there are regular JAM Transit services (P115, 2½ hours) from Manila to nearby Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz' bus terminal is on the highway, about halfway to Pagsanjan; there are jeepneys to and from Pagsanjan (P11).

For San Pablo and Los Baños, jeepneys leave from the plaza in front of Santa Cruz' city hall.

From Pagsanjan you can take a jeepney to the pretty mountain town of Lucban (P30, 45 minutes), and connect from there to Lucena.

### LUCBAN

☎ 042 / pop 39,500

Hidden away in the foothills of Mt Banahaw, the quiet mountain town of Lucban comes alive on 15 May for *Pahiyas*, the annual harvest festival and feast of San Isidro Labrador. Locals compete for a prize by covering their houses in wildly elaborate decorations made from multicoloured rice-starch decorations called *kiping*, as well as with masses of fruit and vegetables. Giant papier-mâché effigies are marched through the streets to the town church. It's a great festival and, best of all, locals are delighted to have foreigners join them in the bounty (if you want a room, book a year in advance).

The air here is pleasantly cool and the narrow streets are full of atmosphere. There are a number of old Spanish townhouses. The Church of St Louis of Toulouse dates from 1738, though it sits atop the ruins of several churches dating back to 1595. Drives in the surrounding verdant hills are lovely.

Among other things, Lucban is known for its *longganisa* (Chinese-style pork sausages) and *pansit* (fried noodles). There are also a few little handicraft shops around the plaza.

**Patio Rizal Hotel** (☎ 540 2107; www.geocities.com/prhlucban; 77 Quezon Ave; r P1000-1800; a ) is a modern, upscale place with a retro design, situated in the centre of town. Its excellent café overlooks a small plaza. Rooms are of an international standard and are quite comfortable.

Enjoy the local specialties at the nearly alphabetical and superfriendly **Abcede's** (☎ 540

2277; Quezon Ave; meals P30-100; a ), a simple café right on the main street.

There are regular jeepneys to Lucena (P35, 50 minutes), which stop on the way at Tayabas (P15, 25 minutes). Pick up the jeepneys on Quezon Ave. Heading to Pagsanjan, jeepneys (P30, 45 minutes) run along Rizal St.

### TAYABAS

☎ 042 / pop 72,400

Approximately halfway between Lucban and Lucena, Tayabas is an attractive and well-preserved town built at the base of the mountains. It is the site of the stalwart St Michael Archangel Basilica, which was built in 1856 over the ruins of a 1585 church. About 3km south from Tayabas, on the road to Mauban, the stone **Malagunlong Bridge** was built by the Spanish in 1840 and looks like something out of a Sergio Leone movie.

Some 6km towards Lucban, **Kamayan Sa Palaisdaan** (☎ 793 3654; dishes P110-200; 7-10am-10pm) is a well-known seafood restaurant. Tables are set in private bamboo shelters, many floating on a fish pond. If you bring your own rod, you can throw in a line from your table and pay for what you catch.

Tayabas is connected by jeepney to Lucena (P20, 25 minutes) and Lucban (P15, 25 minutes).

### LUCENA

☎ 042 / pop 198,000

Most people only pass through Lucena, 120km southeast of Manila, on the way to the lively fishing port of Dalahican, which is the departure point for passenger boats to Marinduque. The capital of Quezon province, Lucena is a pleasant stop before catching a boat or continuing your journey south, but you won't want to linger too long.

Quezon Ave is the main shopping street in Lucena, with numerous restaurants and the **San Ferdinand Cathedral**. There are several banks near the corner of Gomez and Granja Sts, as well as Internet cafés, which charge about P50 per hour.

Next to the Provincial Governors Office, **Museo ng Quezon** (Provincial Health Bldg, Quezon Capitol compound, Quezon Ave; admission free; 7-9am-noon & 1-4.30pm Mon-Fri) houses numerous items of memorabilia from Manuel L Quezon, the dapper first president of the Philippines.

North of town, Quezon Ave turns into the road to Tayabas and Lucban. Follow P

Gomez St for the highway which leads to Atimonan and Dalahican port.

### Sleeping & Eating

You can stay at modern places along the highways outside of town, but the best bet is to stay near the compact and enjoyable centre, which has several cafés and fast-food joints, as well as numerous shops.

**House of Halina Hotel** (☎ 710 2902; halina@quezon.net; 104 Gomez St; r P225-1500; a ) A short walk from Quezon Ave, this sprawling place has a huge variety of reasonably priced rooms set in a large compound. It's starting to fade but the staff are friendly.

**Fresh Air Hotel & Resort** (☎ 710 2424; www.freshairhotel.com; r P220-620; a s ) Outside of town on the road to Manila, this is a clean conference hotel offering 92 rooms that range from the small with fan-cooling to the comfortable with mod cons. It has a popular restaurant.

**Eastern Treasure** (☎ 710 3530; Quezon Ave; meals P100-200; a ) As good as it gets in Lucena. This cavernous place serves up excellent Chinese-Filipino fare. The pork *sisi* (crispy pork) is excellent and the chicken fillet with garlic pepper is superb.

### Getting There & Away

#### BOAT

Several shipping lines have offices at Dalahican port (☎ 373 3992), which is 5km south of the huge new Shoe Mart at the east end of Lucena. Your nostrils will tell you that this is not only a major port for travellers, but also for fishing. A tricycle from town costs P35.

**Blue Magic Ferries** (☎ 710 4168) Runs the fastest service to Balanacan (P220, 1½ hours, twice daily) on Marinduque; also plies the route to Masbate (regular/air-con P550/660, 12 hours, three times a week) on Masbate Island.

**Montenegro Shipping Lines** (☎ 373 7084) Also services Balanacan (P140, 2½ hours, four times daily).

**Phil-Nippon Kyoci Corp** (☎ 373 2458) Goes to Cavite (regular/air-con P165/200, three hours, twice daily) in Cavite.

**Santa Cruz Shipping Services** (☎ 321 1742) Goes to Buyabod (P160, 2½ hours, twice daily) on Marinduque.

#### BUS & JEEPNEY

Numerous companies, including JAM Transit, run frequent buses between Manila and Lucena Grand Central terminal

or Dalahican port; the journey should take four hours and cost about P160/186 for regular/air-con services. From Grand Central – a vast structure 5km north of town on Diversion Rd – there are also air-con buses to Legaspi (P460, nine hours) running three times daily. Regular jeepneys connect Grand Central with the centre (P8) and Dalahican port (P20).

Out of town on the road to Manila (near the Fresh Air Hotel & Resort), you can get jeepneys to Batangas City (P60, 3½ hours) and Lucban (P20, 25 minutes).

#### TRAIN

Lucena is connected by rail to both Manila (regular/air-con P79/102) and Legaspi (P205/276); unfortunately, train schedules are unpredictable due to the horrible nature of the equipment and tracks. A journey to Manila can take from five to eight hours, to Legaspi 13 to 18 hours. Many trains have no air-con cars – it's sort of a lottery to get a train that does. However, if your train runs during daylight hours, the scenery is amazing. There's no food or drink sold aboard.

The cute but forlorn station (☎ 710 4831) is next to the Quezon Capitol compound (P10 by tricycle from the centre).

## NORTH OF MANILA

The Bataan Peninsula north of Manila is the destination for those wishing to recall the fateful 1942 Death March. Otherwise the big draw north is the Subic Bay area, with its nascent resort centre and many activities. Angeles remains utterly unreformed and unreconstructed, although the nearby Clark Airfield is now home to a growing number of bargain airlines.

Looming over it all and attracting a few hardy adventurers is the hulking volcanic Mt Pinatubo.

### BATAAN PENINSULA

For WWII veterans of the Pacific campaign, few places have such bitter associations as the Bataan Peninsula. Both sides saw some of their darkest moments in the jungles around Mt Mariveles. The Dambana ng Kagitingan (Shrine of Valor) atop nearby Mt Samat is a monument to the grim battles that were fought here.

Since the war, the majority of tourists to the area have been returning servicemen, and the passage of time means that this march of memories has slowed to a trickle. Few are left who experienced the Bataan Death March first-hand, a grisly affair that began when 70,000 US and Filipino troops surrendered to the Japanese in April 1942. The victors marched the troops, many sick and diseased from months of fighting, 100km across the peninsula to POW camps. Along the way at least 10,000 perished.

### Mt Samat

Every 9 April, American and Japanese veterans gather at the **Dambana ng Kagitingan** (Shrine of Valor; % 02-911 4296; admission P40;   8am-noon & 1-5pm) on top of Mt Samat and pay tribute to the thousands of their comrades who fell in the surrounding jungles. The centrepiece of the shrine is a 90m-high crucifix with battle scenes carved around its base. There is also a memorial wall, an open-air chapel and a small museum of weapons captured from the Japanese when the Americans returned in 1945.

If it's working, you can take the lift up to the crossbar of the massive crucifix, where there is a long viewing gallery with great views out over Mt Mariveles, Manila Bay and the South China Sea.

Unless you hire a car, the only way to get here is to take a jeepney from Balanga or Orion towards Bagac, get out at the foot of Mt Samat in barangay Diwa, then walk 7km to the shrine. From Balanga, jeepneys leave from the Bataan transport mall (P10). A tricycle from Balanga or the ferry terminal in Orion will do the trip for around P50.

### Balanga

% 047 / pop 73,000

The capital of Bataan province is a friendly little place with a few hotels, a cathedral and a busy town market. It's a good base for hikes up to the WWII shrine at Mt Samat and there are a few interesting churches in the area, most notably in Orion and Abucay (the latter town has a church that dates from at least 1610 and housed the first printing press in the Philippines).

The helpful Provincial Tourism Office (% 237 4785; www.bataan.gov.ph/home;   8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) is inside the Provincial Capitol Building.

### SLEEPING & EATING

There are a few choices if you need to stay overnight for a trip up Mt Samat.

**Hillside Garden Mansions** (% 237 1771; Roman Hwy; r incl breakfast P1500-2100; a ) On the main road heading north, this is a large place with 24 elegant rooms. The best have private Jacuzzis and all come with private bathrooms.

**Elison Hotel** (% /fax 237 2942; Lerma St; s/d P750/950; a ) The better of the two budget hotels in town. It's near the cathedral and city hall. It has 31 rooms; ask for one of the recently renovated ones.

**Lou-is** (% 237 3517; Capitol Dr; meals P100-300;   lunch & dinner; a ) The best place in town, this little compound is redolent with the smell of *manok sa ayo*, a local fave that's a sour soup made from chicken and numerous spices.

Camacho St is lined with little places roasting whole chickens.

### GETTING THERE & AWAY

Ferries are the best way to reach Bataan. The road journey, even with the North Luzon Expressway, can take hours owing to traffic. **Mt Samat Ferry Express** (% 0917 873 2425, 02-551 5290 in Manila; adult/child P300/150) runs boats from Manila's CCP complex to Orion five times a day in each direction; the trip takes an hour. To get from Balanga to Orion port, take a Limay jeepney from the Bataan transport mall and ask to be let out at the port (P20, 30 minutes). It's a five-minute walk or short tricycle ride (P10) to the ferry port from the jeepney stop.

From the Bataan transport mall, **Victory Liner** (% 237 0762) has buses to Olongapo (P60, two hours). Out of town on Capitol Rd, **Bataan Transit** (% 237 1130, 02-724 0156 in Manila) has air-con buses to Cubao in Manila (P150, four hours).

### OLONGAPO & SUBIC BAY

% 047 / pop 205,000

This area remains in transition, despite the time that has passed since the US military left in 1992. Until then, Subic Bay was the base for the huge 7th Fleet of the US Navy. The adjoining town of Olongapo was entirely dependent on the naval base, generating much of its revenue from the sex industry. Now meant to be redeveloped into a thriving tourist mecca, the efforts are meeting with mixed results. Subic Bay

has been rechristened the Subic Bay Freeport Zone (SBFZ) but suffers from a persistent separation from town (it still feels like you're entering a military zone – there's even fresh 'Keep off the grass!' signs everywhere) and a lack of money to erase the mouldering remains of the base, which blight the landscape.

The former naval base is slowly evolving into a busy industrial zone and resort area, with numerous luxury hotels and casinos, and charter flights bringing in gamblers from across Asia. The sex industry is diminished and Olongapo still seems to have a hangover from its wild days as a military town, despite the best efforts of the local Gordon clan, a political dynasty that seems to have a family member in every elected position.

The biggest attractions are scuba diving on one of the many shipwrecks that lie on the bottom of Subic Bay, or visiting the various attractions tied to local ecology. With a hire car, Olongapo is also a good base from which to explore Bataan, the area around Mt Pinatubo (p134) and the Zambales coastline (p138).

### Information

The **SBFZ Tourism Department** (% 252 4154; www.sbma.com; 2nd fl, Bldg 662, Taft St, SBFZ;   8am-6pm) has information on activities, accommodation and restaurants.

Internet cafés, banks and shops are concentrated along Rizal Ave in Olongapo.

### Sights & Activities

For many, the highlight of a visit is the **Jungle Environment Survival Training (JEST) Camp** (% 252 9072, 252 2319; admission P100;   8am-5pm), where the indigenous people of the area, the Aeta, were employed to teach US servicemen how to survive in the jungle. Today the facility offers demonstrations of survival techniques, from producing fire to making soap from jungle plants, and there's a mini-zoo and museum. You can try your hand at survival for three hours (P250) or overnight (P500); you supply your own equipment. Winstar buses shuttle here from the SBFZ gate (P15).

The **Subic Bay Nature Park** (% 252 4123, 252 4242; admission P20) extends the effort to recreate Subic Bay as an ecotourism destination. The park has trails through bamboo forests and mangroves, and interesting sights

include the 50-year-old US Navy bunkers and the 'driftwood garden' – mangroves petrified by the sulphuric ashes from Mt Pinatubo. In the same area is **Bat Kingdom** – the biggest known roosting site of the world's largest bats: the Philippine fruit bat and the golden-crowned flying fox.

On the next headland south, **Ocean Adventure** (% 252 9000; www.oceanadventure.com.ph; Camayan Wharf, West Ilanin Forest Area; adult/child P450/370;   9am-6pm) is an open-water marine park where you can see dolphins, sea lions and other aquatic critters.

The last two attractions can only be reached by private vehicle. If you have your own transport, the SBFZ Tourism Department can organise a guided **bay tour** (per vehicle P150) that takes you on a flexible itinerary around the area.

### WATER SPORTS

Of the seven wrecks commonly visited by divers, the *USS New York* (at a depth of 28m) is probably the most impressive. The battle cruiser was built in 1891 and was scuttled by American troops in 1941 to keep it out of Japanese hands. Other wrecks include the *Oryoku Maru* (20m), the *Seian Maru* (27m), *El Capitan* (20m), the 1898 wreck of the *San Quintin* (16m) and several small patrol boats and landing craft. The best time for water clarity is from February to April.

**Subic Bay Aqua Sports** (% 252 7343; sbas\_inc@hotmail.com; 249 Waterfront Rd;   8am-5pm) is a friendly and laid-back place with heaps of knowledge and a good bar right on the sand. Equipment rental for a day of diving is US\$30. For US\$20 more, you can have a divemaster lead you to the wrecks. It offers PADI certification (US\$300) and rents out a range of water-sports equipment.

**Networkx Jetsports** (% 252 3469; Waterfront Rd;   9am-6pm) offers a full complement of adrenaline-producing experiences, including parasailing (P1000) and jet-ski rentals (P2800 per hour).

**Baloy Long Beach**, at the north end of baryo Barretto, is probably the best beach in the area. You can get here with the blue jeepney from the Victory Liner terminal (P8). The beaches are also good on **Grande Island** (day admission with transport & lunch P1200), out in the bay. Otherwise, the beaches near town are fairly undesirable.



## Sleeping

The top hotels are all within the SBFZ.

**Subic Park Hotel** (☎ 252 2092; www.subicparkhotel.com; 93 Moonbay Marina, Waterfront Rd; r P1750-3000; a s ) Right on the water, this low-key place is a good choice in the SBFZ. Rooms are large and comfortable and the most expensive have good bay views.

**Courtyard Inn** (☎ 252 2366; www.courtyardinnsbic.com; Waterfront Rd; r P2000-2650; a i ) A well-run place, the Courtyard is across from the water and has 38 almost-new, well-appointed rooms. It's across from Networx Jetsports' small activities centre.

The Legenda group owns the **Legenda Hotel** (☎ 252 1888; www.subiclegend.com; Waterfront Rd; r from US\$95; a s ) and **Grand Seasons Hotel** (☎ 252 2888; www.subiclegend.com; Canal Rd; r from US\$95; a s ), both of which have casinos and luxurious four-star amenities including room service and the like. The former has 254 modern and comfortable rooms near the water, while the latter is restrained in décor and somewhat oddly sited back closer to Olongapo.

**Ridgecrest Gardens Hotel** (☎ 222 2006; 15 Magsaysay Dr, Olongapo; r P650-1100; a ) has 31 modern and comfortable rooms. As you add expense, rooms include cable TV, fridges and more. It's a good budget choice.

## Eating

Most of the restaurants and bars from Olongapo's heyday are long gone. Newer places are down by the water in the SBFZ, or in the hotels.

**Gerry's** (☎ 252 3021; Waterfront Rd; meals P150-500; h 11am-midnight) Right on the water, this spot is part of a popular chain of casual Filipino eateries with everything from burgers to *halu-halo* (fruit preserves served with crushed ice, ice cream and coconut milk). There's a lively bar and snappy, professional staff.

**Sam's Pizza** (☎ 222 3686; Magsaysay Dr; meals P70-250; h 10am-2am; a ) Probably the best of the pizza joints in town. It has live music many evenings and a menu that includes pleasers beyond pizza like sandwiches and pasta.

## Entertainment

The casinos at the Legenda and Grand Seasons Hotels, as well as the **Subic Diamond Casino** (☎ 252 0888; 408 Waterfront Rd) in the SBFZ are heavily patronised by Chinese gamblers brought in on cheap charter flights. All

charge P100 admission, and all are open 24 hours.

## Getting There & Around

The only flights into **Subic Bay International Airport** (☎ 252 9360) are charter flights from Asia filled with low-rolling gamblers.

**Victory Liner** (☎ 222 2241) and **Saulog Transit** (☎ 02-825 2926 in Manila), both off Rizal Ave, have buses at least once an hour between Manila and Olongapo (P160, three to four hours). **Victory Liner** also has buses to Balanga (P60, two hours).

Jeepneys in Olongapo are colour-coded. Yellow jeepneys run along Rizal Ave to the SBFZ main gate (P8). Blue jeepneys leave for Subic village (P10), north of SBFZ, from the street behind the Victory Liner terminal.

Ask at your lodging about renting a car. There are several agencies, and rates average about P1800 per day without a driver.

## SAN FERNANDO (PAMPANGA)

☎ 045 / pop 221,900

The busy industrial town of San Fernando – not to be confused with San Fernando (La Union), northwest of Baguio – is the capital of Pampanga province.

One of the main reasons people come here is to see fanatical Christians taking part in a crucifixion ceremony every Easter. At noon on Good Friday, in barangay San Pedro Cutud, volunteers with a penchant for pain are nailed to wooden crosses and whipped till they bleed.

**Victory Liner** and **Saulog Transit** buses from Manila to Olongapo pass through San Fernando; it's two hours and about P80 from either end. Jeepneys go north to Angeles (P25, 30 minutes).

## ANGELES & CLARK SPECIAL ECONOMIC ZONE

☎ 045 / pop 258,000

Angeles is a name synonymous with the sex industry in the Philippines, even if the actual red-light district is in the downtown area of Balibago. The strip of tacky clubs and bars is strung out along Fields Ave, a pothole-filled road replete with broken pavements and stagnant water. The 10,000 girls and women working now are only the vestiges of the time before the American pullout, when it was estimated that ten times as many were employed.

Angeles remains tied to the fortunes of the US Air Force's former station, Clark Airbase (now known as the Clark Special Economic Zone). It is still an important base for the Philippine Air Force and there has been some success in luring new businesses, so Clark does not have the forlorn air of some parts of Subic. Recent success in luring bargain airlines here means that it has new relevance for travellers as well.

Looming over everything is Mt Pinatubo, whose 1991 eruption caused much destruction locally; the resulting lava wastelands lure intrepid trekkers today.

## Orientation & Information

Balibago (Angeles proper is 2km south) doesn't consist of much more than Fields Ave and its extension, Don Juico Ave. Large jeepney stations and the main gate for Clark (aka 'Checkpoint') are in close proximity to Fields Ave, as are Internet cafés, banks and shops. Dau, a useful transportation hub, is just north of Clark.

## Sleeping & Eating

There are dozens of cheap hotels along Fields Ave and Don Juico Ave, but most are geared to prostitution.

**Clarkton Hotel** (☎ 892 6272; www.clarkton.com; 620 Don Juico Ave; r P1200-2000; a i s ) A bit away from the bars, the Clarkton is large and comfortable. Rooms have high-speed Internet, and there's a decent restaurant.

**Oasis Resort Complex** (☎ 893 3301; www.oasishotel.com.ph; Don Juico Ave; r P1000-2200; a i s ) The 124 rooms here actually do slightly live up to the hotel's name, in that they are set back from the noisy street in a peaceful gated compound. The pool is huge and there's a wide range of modern amenities, including a business centre – although the open-air billiards area is oodles more fun.

**Blu Bianco Suites** (☎ 599 3956; cnr CMR Recto Hwy & ML Quezon Ave; s/d P1320/2000; a ) Located inside Clark, this is a low-key, friendly place with a restaurant. It's a quiet retreat far away from the dubious charms of Angeles.

## Getting There & Away

Angeles and Clark are under 90 minutes from Manila by the North Luzon Expressway, but once in the big city, you'll be caught in the same traffic that probably caused you to leave Manila.

## ALONE IN ANGELES

Despite the efforts – false or otherwise – of the women working in the bars and clubs, Fields Ave is a pretty joyless place. Scores of Western men, most a decade or three older than their female companions, are lost in solitude. It's not uncommon to see a bar where every table has a lone Westerner, moodily sipping a beer, smoking a cigarette and staring off into space. Some are Europeans, obviously just here for the sex; others are Americans, many of an age that would have made it possible for them to be at Clark – and Angeles – at the height of the Vietnam War. Are they recalling a time from their youth when they let loose here with girls who looked the same but were the mothers or grandmothers of the current workers? It's hard to tell, as they're not talking amidst the neon glow and clamour of places with names like Doll House, Bunny Ranch and Suckers.

## AIR

Discount airlines have discovered Diosdado Macapagal International Airport (CRK) in the Clark Special Economic Zone. The terminal is modern but stark; there are no ATMs, although there is plenty of parking. Each of the airlines tends to run special buses (fares about P350) to and from Manila.

The following airlines are among those flying into the Clark Special Economic Zone.

**Air Asia** (www.airasia.com) To Kuala Lumpur and Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia.

**CR Airways** (www.crayways.com) To Hong Kong.

**Tiger Airways** (www.tigerairways.com) To Singapore.

## BUS

Philippine Rabbit has air-con buses every 30 minutes from Rizal Ave (also called Avenida) in Manila to its terminal on Henson St in Angeles village (P90, 90 minutes). **Victory Liner** buses leave from EDSA (Manila's ring road) in Pasay City every hour and travel via Angeles to the Mabalacat bus terminal in Dau (P90, 90 minutes). Travel times can soar during Manila traffic jams.

## Getting Around

Jeepneys run between Dau, Angeles village and Balibago (P5). Taxis into Clark can be found at Checkpoint.

## MT PINATUBO

For centuries, the residents of Angeles took the nearby volcanoes of Mt Pinatubo and Mt Arayat for granted. That changed suddenly on 15 June 1991, when Pinatubo, the larger of the two volcanoes, literally blew itself apart, sending a column of ash and rock 40km into the air. The mountain lost 300m in height, and fine dust and fist-sized fragments of rock rained down on nearby Angeles, Clark Airbase and Subic Bay. Compounding the catastrophe, a savage typhoon chose this moment to lash northern Luzon, turning the ash into lethal lahar (mobile volcanic mud), which flooded downhill from the volcano with dire consequences.

The easily eroded lahar flows have created a stunning landscape around the volcano. The Abacan and Pasig-Potrero Rivers have cut channels through the sediment, leaving towering pinnacles of lahar, hanging valleys and canyons. In the dry season it's possible to wander for hours through the canyons or even trek all the way to the volcano summit.

The starting point for the trip is at Santa Juliana, about 40km from Angeles. Start at the visitor assistance centre near the barangay hall; receive a briefing, and register and pay for a Pinatubo permit (P50). Mountain guides are mandatory, and Department of Tourism-accredited ones can be arranged here (from P500 for up to five people). Tips or donations are gratefully received, and go into a communal pot to pay for road repairs and loans to farmers in the village.

You can hike all the way to the summit (1760m) in the dry season (November to

May), but it will be a very long day as the trek can take over eight hours one way. An overnight trip is more advisable, but visitors will need to bring their own food and camping equipment. Bring plenty of water and don't go if it looks like it will rain.

Many people book tours and transport through travel agents in Angeles, such as **Trend Transport** (☎ 045-332 1712; 1035 Fields Ave; per person P3000). **Power Up** (☎ 0908 902 0754, 02-631 4675; from per person P1500), a climbing outfit based in Manila, can also design and lead hikes of the volcano.

It's fairly easy to arrange the trip yourself. The **Santa Juliana Tourism Council** (☎ 0973 538 475) can set you up with guides, jeep rentals (from P1500) and homestays. You can get here on a north-bound jeepney from Angeles (P50); ask the driver to let you out at the intersection for Santa Juliana. Then take a tricycle (P60) into town.

These two locals have good reputations for organising trips up Mt Pinatubo: **Jude Lenon** (☎ 0920 576 2769, 0920 803 5647) **Edwin Manalang** (☎ 0910 722 7575)

## MT ARAYAT

Many people arriving in Angeles mistake the towering volcanic cone of Mt Arayat (1026m) for Pinatubo, as it dominates the skyline. The volcano affords several half-day hikes to peaks on the crater rim, from where there are stunning views over Pampanga province. Also here is a network of swimming pools fed by a natural spring which, legend has it, produces the purest water on earth.