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ACCOMMODATION

There is a wide range of accommodation available in the Philippines, from simple nipa (palm) huts to international-class hotels. In this book, we divide accommodation into the following categories according to the price of the room (per double, per night): budget (up to P850), midrange (P850 to P2000), and top end (over P2000). We list high-season prices for accommodation in this book, unless otherwise noted. Note that most resorts and hotels offer discounts of 20% to 40% during the low season. The high season for accommodation in the Philippines runs roughly from late November to March.

Guesthouses

Guesthouses are basically small hotels that cater specifically to travellers, often foreign travellers. These can be found in many of the towns frequented by travellers. They usually offer a variety of rooms at budget and midrange prices. The advantage of these places is that you can meet other travellers and exchange information. The owners are often extremely knowledgeable about their local areas.

PRACTICALITIES

- English-language national dailies run the gamut from the conservative *Manila Bulletin* to the critical *Philippine Daily Inquirer* and the feel-good *Philippine Star*. The best of the lot may be *Business World*, which has a good entertainment section on Friday. The *International Herald-Tribune* can be found in the big hotels and in bookshops in larger cities. A wide variety of homegrown and international magazines are also available.
- Manila rock/pop stations worth listening to are K-lite 103.5 and Nu Rock 107.5. Manila TV stations broadcast both English-language and Filipino programmes.
- The Philippines uses the NTSC video system.
- In most places in the Philippines, electricity is 220V, 50Hz to 60Hz; exceptions are Baguio (wired once-upon-a-time by US occupation forces), where voltage is 110V; and some top-end hotels, which have both 220V and 110V outlets. Plugs are of the US-style flat two-pin variety.
- The Philippines uses the metric system, but inches and feet are more common in everyday use for measuring things (except textiles, which are often sold in yards). Weights are normally quoted in kilograms and distances in kilometres (see the conversion table on the inside front cover).

BOOK ACCOMMODATION ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at www.lonelyplanet.com. You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

Hotels

Hotels can be found in most towns and cities in the Philippines. In the bigger cities, these will range from extremely simple places, with only a few rooms, to international luxury hotels. In the smaller towns, the hotel offerings may be limited to one or two simple places.

If your budget only stretches to P300 a night for a hotel, your options will be extremely limited in most parts of the country. A reasonably clean single 'broom closet' can be found in many places for about P500, but you'll probably want to double that price to find anything liveable.

If you're not on a rock-bottom budget, take a look at midrange hotels. The most expensive rooms in a budget hotel can be very ordinary and P1000 or so won't seem worth it; for the same price, the cheapest rooms in a midrange place are often far superior.

Resorts

Resorts are the main accommodation option on islands and beaches in the Philip-

ppines. These range from simple clusters of nipa huts which charge around P700 per night for the whole hut, to international luxury resorts that charge in excess of US\$200 per person for one night. Note that it's often more pleasant to stay in a beachside resort than in a city hotel, so it's worth checking if any resorts lie on the outskirts of a city when you arrive. You can always hire a tricycle to check out a few options.

ACTIVITIES

The Philippines is an adventure-sports and outdoor-sports paradise. You can snorkel, dive, surf, trek, cave and cycle your way around the archipelago.

Canoeing, Kayaking & Rafting

Shooting the rapids in Pagsanjan (p126) is one of the Philippines' major tourist activities. Further north, in the Cordillera region of North Luzon (p153), there is good white-water rafting on the Chico and Pinaricanauan Rivers.

The mighty Tibiao River on Panay churns up some healthy white water, and kayaking is popular out of the town of Tibiao (p319).

Resorts often rent kayaks and canoes for paddling about, and the natural wonders of places like the Bacuit Archipelago off Palawan can be appreciated on kayaking tours. If you have your own equipment, sea kayaking is excellent off Naga in Southeast Luzon.

LIVE-ABOARDS

Live-aboards (boats that divers sleep on during dive trips) are the only way to get to many remote diving sites throughout the Philippines, and live-aboards ranging from custom dive boats and yachts to converted fishing vessels and modified bangka boats make dive safaris to islands throughout the Visayas, northern Palawan, the Sibuyan Sea, the Sulu Sea and the Apo Reef. Live-aboard and dive safaris depart from and/or are organised by dive operators in Puerto Galera, Boracay, throughout the Visayas, and from most diving destinations in Palawan, including Puerto Princesa.

There are relatively small numbers of live-aboard boats meeting internationally accepted standards that visit Tubbataha in any given season (February to June). These vessels usually offer 'transition trips' at reduced prices when moving from and returning to their home ports, usually in January and June or July.

Those seeking budget trips to the Sulu Sea are catered for with varying degrees of integrity, and not all of the options are as safe, luxurious or comfortable as the conditions might sometimes dictate. In general, choosing a live-aboard boat should be as much or more a function of assessing the safety, seaworthiness and professionalism of an operation rather than the price.

Caving

The Philippines is a spelunker's dream. The porous limestone that makes up most of the archipelago is riddled with a fantastic variety of caves, many of which are accessible to the average traveller. Luzon, in particular, has many interesting caves to explore. The Callao Cave (p178) in Peñablanca, near Tuguegarao, is a major tourist drawcard, and there is also good caving around Sagada and Solano.

Bohol's best caving can be found near Antequera (p272) at the Mag-aso and Inambacan Falls. Near Surigao (p371) on Mindanao is Silop Cave, with its 12 entrances that lead to a large central chamber. Spooky Siquijor (p294) is honeycombed with caves that have yielded many surprises, including ancient Chinese pottery. Still more good caving can be found on Panay (p298) and Leyte (p354).

Finally, don't miss the Puerto Princesa Subterranean River National Park outside Sabang (p415) on the island of Palawan. This Unesco World Heritage Site is said to be the longest underground river-traversed tunnel in the world.

Cycling

The Philippines isn't all beaches and volcanoes, and mountain-biking is taking off as an activity in its own right on a number of islands – see p451 for details.

Diving & Snorkelling

See p59 for the lowdown on the top spots to dive in the Philippines, as well as regulations and requirements, rates and other information on diving and snorkelling activities. For even more information, get yourself a copy of Lonely Planet's *Diving & Snorkeling Philippines*.

Hiking & Trekking

Hiking is possible on nearly every island and most famously on Luzon, where a trek through the awesome rice terraces around Banaue (p170) and Batad (p173) is a highlight of any trip to the country. There are also pleasant hikes around Sagada (p164), and the Batanes (p180) offer rugged coastal strolls.

Volcano climbing is a popular pastime, and ranges from short and sweet ascents to long and sweaty treks. Be aware of current

conditions – not only are many of these volcanoes active, some (such as the tiny Taal Volcano; see p120) are notoriously so. You can check with the **Philippines Institute of Volcanology and Seismology** (Philvolcs; % 02-426 1468; www.phivolcs.dost.gov.ph) in Manila for the latest conditions.

Hiking around the bizarre lahar formations of Mt Pinatubo (p134) rates highly on many visitors' lists, though the dormant volcano of Mt Banahaw (p127) offers some of the best hiking on Luzon. Lake Taal (p120) also has several good hiking options.

Hibok-Hibok volcano on Camiguin (p380) is a steep, full-day climb. Mt Apo (2954m; see p392) on Mindanao is the highest mountain in the Philippines; if you're in good shape, a three-day trek up the mountain is a rewarding adventure.

Surfing

Although Indonesia is the undisputed surfing mecca of Southeast Asia, the Philippines has a good assortment of breaks.

Popular destinations on Luzon include San Fernando (La Union; p142) and Bolinao (p139) on the Lingayen Gulf, and Daet (p186) in Southeast Luzon.

Off Mindanao's northeastern tip, Siargao Island (p373) is famed for Cloud Nine, which is an excellent, if fickle, break.

Windsurfing

Windsurfing is possible all over the Philippines. Lake Taal (p120) and the sea off Anilao (p123) are popular spots, but the wilder east coast of Boracay (p325) is said to offer the best conditions for surfers of all skill levels. Parasailing is also available on some beaches frequented by foreign visitors.

BUSINESS HOURS

Banks 9am to 3pm Monday to Friday (most ATMs operate 24 hours daily).

Bars 8pm to late, daily.

Department stores & supermarkets 9am to 7pm or 8pm, daily.

Embassies & consulates 9am to 1pm, Monday to Friday.

Museums 8am to noon and 1pm to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Post offices 8am to noon and 1pm to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

Public & private offices 8am or 9am to 5pm or 6pm, with a lunch break from noon to 1pm, Monday to Friday.

Restaurants 8am to 11pm, daily.

CHILDREN

Filipinos are simply crazy about kids, and rather fond of parents, too – you and your offspring will be the focus of many conversations, and your children won't lack for playful company.

You should supervise your children when swimming or playing on beaches, and make sure they understand not to touch coral. Bring plenty of sunscreen and light clothes for sun protection. It's important to keep small children well hydrated in a hot climate.

You can usually buy disposable nappies (diapers) and infant formula in most towns and all cities, but be sure to stock up on such things before heading off the beaten track.

Lonely Planet's *Travel with Children* by Cathy Lanigan has more useful advice about tropical travel with kids.

Practicalities

Many hotels and resorts offer family rooms and can provide cots on request. Discreet breastfeeding in public is acceptable in all areas except some conservative Muslim areas in the south. It is almost impossible to arrange a taxi with a child seat. Some restaurants can provide a high chair upon request.

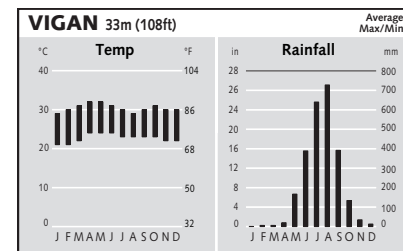
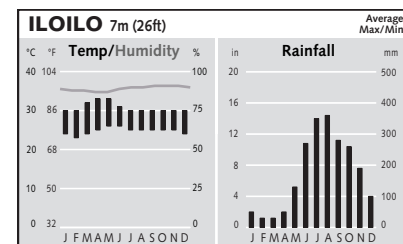
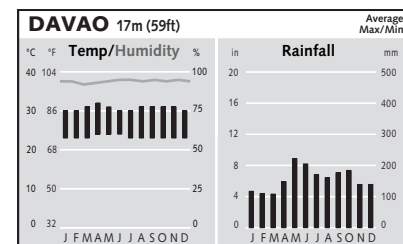
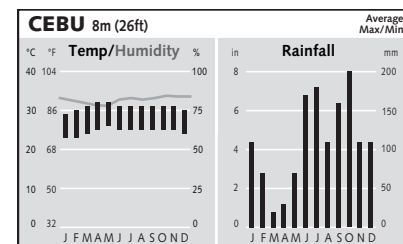
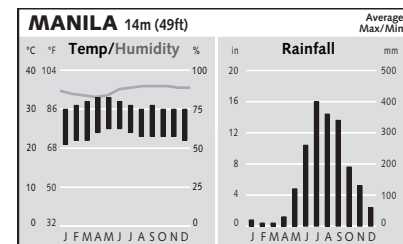
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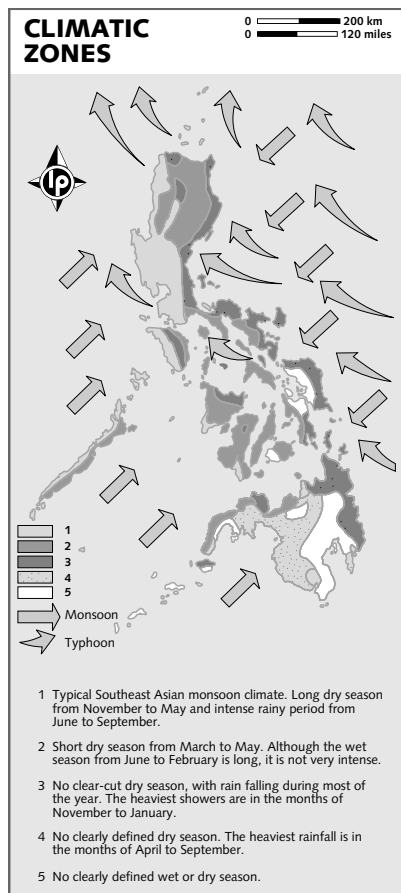
The Philippines has two seasons: dry and wet. Generally, the dry season is from November to May and the wet season is from June to September, though weather patterns have become much less predictable.

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.

An average of 20 typhoons, known as *bagyo*, whip across the Philippines each year. 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.

CUSTOMS

Firearms, illegal drugs and pornography are forbidden. You can bring up to 2L of alcohol and up to 400 cigarettes (or two tins of tobacco) into the country without paying duty. Foreign currency of more than P10,000 must be declared on entry or exit.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

There's no glossing over the fact that the Philippines has more than its share of dangers and annoyances. These range from the danger of kidnapping in the south of the country to the wide range of scams and

rip-offs that await the unwary traveller in Manila.

Of course, it's not just the outright dangers that can make travel unpleasant in various parts of the Philippines, it's also the annoyances. Depending upon your sensibilities and values, you may find the overt prostitution scene quite disturbing, particularly if you are unlucky enough to see evidence of the Philippines' bustling child prostitution industry (in places like Angeles).

It's also worth pointing out that Manila itself can be extremely challenging for some travellers. The poverty, air and noise pollution, crowds and heavy traffic conditions are enough to make even the most seasoned traveller yearn for escape. Luckily, escape is usually no more than a quick bus or plane ride away.

Scams

The most common scam in the Philippines involves drugging a tourist's drinks or food and then robbing them. Be wary of any overly friendly stranger offering you food or drink. Some moneychangers also scam tourists out of money by using sleight-of-hand gimmicks and short-change scams.

DISABLED TRAVELLERS

Like most developing countries, the Philippines lacks the convenient infrastructure and services that make getting around easier for the disabled. Very rarely will you find wheelchair-accessible toilets or wheelchair ramps. Moreover, the lack of proper footpaths and the anarchic traffic conditions of cities like Manila make getting around a real problem for the mobility impaired. On the plus side, you will find that Filipinos are quick to offer assistance. Furthermore, prices are cheap enough in the Philippines to make hiring a taxi for the day and/or even a personal assistant a reasonable option.

DISCOUNT CARDS

A 20% discount on domestic flights is offered by PAL, Air Philippines, Cebu Pacific and SEAIR for passengers who are at least 60 years old; your passport will suffice as proof of age. Asian Spirit offers 30% reductions to seniors.

Some shipping lines discount 15% to 30% if you can show a valid student ID.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

Philippine Embassies & Consulates

Australia Canberra (% 02-6273 2535/36; www.phil embassy.au.com; 1 Moonah Place, Yarralumla, Canberra, ACT 2600); Melbourne (% 03-9863 7885; Suite 1205, 1 Queens Rd, Melbourne, VIC 3004); Sydney (% 02-9262 7377; physdpc@ozemail.com.au; Level 1, Philippine Centre, 27-33 Wentworth Ave, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Canada Ottawa (% 1613-233 1121; Suite 606, 130 Albert St, Ottawa, ON K1P5G4); Toronto (% 416-922 7181; www.philcongen-toronto.com; 161 Eglinton Ave East, Suite 800, Toronto, ON M4P 1J5); Vancouver (% 604-685 1619/7645; www.vancouverpcg.net; Suite 1405, 700 West Pender Street, Vancouver, BC V6C1G8)

France Paris (% 331 4414 5700/5701/5702/5703; 4 Hameau de Boulaivilliers, Paris 75016)

Germany Berlin (% 4930-864 9500; www.philippine-embassy.de; Umlandstrasse 97, 10715 Berlin); Hamburg (% 040-442 952/953; Jungfrauental 13, 20149 Hamburg)

New Zealand Wellington (% 04-472 9848; 50 Hobson St, Thorndon, Wellington)

UK London (% 4420-7937 1600; www.philemb.org.uk; 9A Palace Green, London W8 4QE)

USA Los Angeles (% 213-639 0980; www.philcongenla.org; Suite 500, 3600 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 900100); San Francisco (% 415-433 6666/68/75/80; 6F, 447 Sutter St, San Francisco, CA 94108); Washington DC (% 202-467 9300/9363/9382; www.philippineembassy-usa.org; 1600 Massachusetts Ave NW, Washington, DC 20036)

Embassies & Consulates in the Philippines

EMBASSIES IN MANILA

Australia (Map pp86-7; % 02-757 8100/8102; www.australia.com.ph; 23rd fl, Tower 2, RCBC Plaza, 6819 Ayala Ave, Makati City)

Canada (Map pp86-7; % 02-857 9000/9002/9055/9131; www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/manila; 6th & 8th fl, RCBC Plaza, 6819 Ayala Ave, Makati City)

France (Map pp86-7; % 02-810 1981-88; 16th fl, Pacific Star Bldg, cnr Gil Puyat Ave & Makati Ave, Makati City)

Germany (Map pp86-7; % 02-892 4906; 6th fl, Solid Bank Bldg, 777 Paseo de Roxas, Makati City)

Netherlands (Map pp86-7; % 02-812 5981; www.netherlandsembassy.ph; 9th fl, King's Court Bldg, 2129 Chino Roces Ave, Makati City)

New Zealand (Map pp86-7; % 02-891 5358-67; www.nzembassy.com; 23rd fl, BPI Buendia Center, Gil Puyat Ave, Salcedo Village, Makati City)

UK (Map pp86-7; % 02-816 7116; www.britishembassy.gov.uk; 15th-17th fl, LV Locsin Bldg, cnr Makati Ave & Ayala Ave, Makati City)

USA (Map pp80-1; % 02-528 6300; www.manila.usembassy.gov; 1201 Roxas Blvd, Ermita, Manila)

CONSULATES IN CEBU CITY

Canada (% 032-254 4749/256 3320; 45-L Andres Abellana St)

France (% 032-232 0936; 556 Juan Luna St, Mabolo)

UK (% 032-346 0525; www.britishembassy.gov.uk; 4 Palmera St, Villa Terrace, Greenhills Rd, Casuntingan, Mandaue City)

USA (% 032 231 1261; http://manila.usembassy.gov/www/ha015.html; Waterfront Hotel, Lahug) US Consular Agency.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

January

Three Kings Festival Celebrated in early January, this festival is a handy way to put off the holiday hangover until the New Year; it marks the official end of Christmas.

Black Nazarene Procession (p79) The Quiapo Church, in Manila's Quiapo district, houses the Black Nazarene, a black image of Christ, which is paraded through the streets in a massive procession on the second Tuesday of January and again during Holy Week (the week between Palm Sunday and Easter).

Kabakalan Sinulog (p286) Held on the second Sunday of the month in La Carlota on Negros, this is a wild street party in which dancers are daubed in black in honour of the island's Negrito people and a feast is held to honour Santo Niño (the child Jesus).

Ati-Atihan Peaking on the third weekend of the month, this week-long mother of all mardi gras rages from dawn to dusk and is at its most riotous in Kalibo on Panay (p322). Similar festivals are also held in neighbouring towns. Cadiz on Negros celebrates its Ati-Atihan Festival in honour of patron saint Santo Niño (residents believe the Holy Infant protected the settlement from pirate attack) on the weekend nearest 26 January.

Dinagyang Festival (p300) Held on the fourth weekend of January in Iloilo City on Panay, this mardi gras-style festival honours the Santo Niño with extravagant costumes and dancing.

Chinese New Year Celebrated in January or February, the Lunar New Year used to be celebrated by the Chinese community only, but has become popular among all Filipinos in recent years; there are dragon dances and fireworks displays in some places predominantly populated by Chinese-Filipinos.

February/March

Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria (p300) On 2 February in Jaro, Iloilo City, on the island of Panay, the Feast of Our Lady of Candles is a street party and religious ritual in one.

Bamboo Organ Festival (p119) In the second week of February, music lovers gather at the church of Las Piñas, near Manila, to listen to organists play the world's only bamboo organ.

Panagbenga Flower Festival For two weeks the streets in the northern city of Baguio come alive with song and dance as floral parades with some spectacular floats are held.

Paraw Regatta (p300) In late February or early March an exciting race is held between Iloilo City on Panay to Guimaras Island, in traditional sailing boats called *paraw*. Dating from the 16th century, the race imitates the original journey thought to have been made by Malay settlers arriving from Borneo. Note that the regatta is sometimes held in March.

Kaumulan Festival (p385) From mid-February to late March, Malaybalay, near Cagayan de Oro on Mindanao, is the setting for this celebration of unity between the tribal people in the area, through dance, song, storytelling, eating and drinking.

Sinagayan Festival In mid- to late March, Sagay City on Negros holds this festival in honour of St Joseph.

April/May

Crucifixion Reenactments On Good Friday during Holy Week (the week leading to Easter), a combination of religious fervour and morbid fascination drives the flocks to places like San Fernando (Pampanga) on Luzon (p132) to see devotees being literally nailed to wooden crosses. There are also gangs of flagellants who whip themselves until they bleed. A more sober affair is Ang Pagtaltal Sa Guimaras in Jordan on Guimaras (p308); this usually features a Christ roped rather than nailed to his cross (and he's often helped up there with a few stiff drinks).

Senakulo & Pabasa Also during Holy Week, passion plays (*senakulo* or *cenaculo*) are staged in various parts of the country, while *pabasa* or *pasyon*, a recitation of the passion of Christ, is held in many neighbourhoods.

Moriones Festival (p201) In April on the island of Marinduque, passion plays are staged by townspeople wearing unique costumes and masks; this is one of most famous festivals in the Philippines.

Lenten Festival of Herbal Preparation (p295) On Black Saturday (the day before Easter) in San Antonio on Siquijor, traditional healers strut their stuff to big crowds. Dozens of native doctors gather around a big pot, chanting and preparing a medicinal concoction that people say works.

Pana-ad sa Negros Held in April in Bacolod on Negros, this was originally a street festival, but now includes lively displays of arts and crafts from the 22 towns and 10 cities in the area.

Pista'y Dayat (p142) On 1 May the coastal towns of the Lingayen Gulf on Luzon pay homage to local fishermen with the area's foremost fiesta.

Pasalamat Festival (p286) On the Sunday nearest 1 May, this fun thanksgiving ritual honours the year's harvest in La Carlota on Negros.

Viva Vigan Festival of the Arts (p148) In the first week of May, the old historic town of Vigan in the north

celebrates its heritage with, among other events, a *kalesa* (horse-drawn carriage) festival, *zarzuelas* (operettas) and *abel* (weaving) exhibits.

Kalabaw Races (p300) In early May, Pavia, just outside Iloilo City on Panay, is a good place to watch water-buffalo races.

Flores de Mayo & Santacruzán Throughout the country, May sees little girls in white dresses strewing flowers around an image of the Virgin Mary in a centuries-old custom known as Flores de Mayo. In the evening, young ladies with their escorts go around town in a candlelit procession (Santacruzán), celebrating an old Christian belief about the finding of the cross by St Helena.

Pahiyas sa Lucban (p128) One of the most famous fiestas in the Philippines; in May the town of Lucban in Quezon celebrates by decking its houses with colourful *kipping* decorations which are later eaten.

Obando Fiesta Legend has it that women will be blessed with child if they dance before the image of Santa Clara, patron saint of Obando in Bulacan, near Manila. Naturally the town's fiesta, from 17 to 19 May, is celebrated with lots of dancing.

Balibong Kingking Festival (p271) More street dancing in this fiesta, honouring Our Lady of Guadalupe, held in late May to June, in the town of Loboc on Bohol.

June

Independence Day Filipinos proclaimed their independence from Spain on 12 June, 1898, an event now celebrated nationwide with civic parades, including a huge one at Rizal Park (Luneta) in Manila.

Araw ng Kutabato (p396) In mid-June, the city of Cotabato on Mindanao plays host to massive dance parades.

Parada ng Lechon A unique fiesta on 24 June in Balayan, Batangas, south of Manila, treating visitors to a parade of *lechon* (roast suckling pig).

Pintados-Kasadyaan (p356) Held on 29 June, this 'painted festival' in Tacloban on Leyte celebrates pre-Spanish traditional tattooing practices, albeit using water-based paints for the festival's body decorations.

August

Kadayawan sa Dabaw Festival (p389) During the third week of August, Davao on Mindanao showcases its Muslim, Chinese and tribal influences with parades, performances, and fruit and flowers displays.

Lubi-Lubi Festival On 15 August, the town of Calubian, on Leyte, celebrates the town's namesake, the coconut.

September

Tuna Festival (p393) From 1 to 5 September, General Santos on Mindanao celebrates the king of all tinned creatures. The festival includes a best-dressed tuna competition, a parade of fishing floats and a sashimi night.

Peñafrancia Festival (p187) In the third week of each September pilgrims flock to Naga in southeast Luzon to celebrate the Bicol region's patron saint, the Virgin of Peñafrancia.

October

Fiesta de Nuestra Señora Virgen del Pilar (p399) Held from 10 to 12 October, this Christian festival also involves partying, eating and dancing, as well as a big regatta featuring brightly coloured traditional sail boats.

MassKara Festival (p282) In Bacolod on Negros on the weekend nearest 19 October, this joyful 'many faces festival' features mask-wearing participants and dancing in the streets.

November

All Saints' Day (Todos los Santos) Around 1 November, Christian cemeteries throughout the archipelago are spruced up and crypts are given a fresh coat of whitewash. On the evening of All Saints' Day (Halloween in the Western world), families laden with food gather at the local cemetery to spend the night remembering their departed loved ones. The atmosphere is surprisingly festive and foreign visitors who stroll through the cemetery will invariably be invited to join in. If you happen to be in Manila, don't miss the party at the Chinese Cemetery.

Pintafores Festival (p292) Held in San Carlos on Negros from 3 to 5 November, this famously frenzied street festival has its roots in the traditional Filipino method of welcoming foreigners; en masse dancing.

Lem-Lunay Festival (p395) Celebrated in the second week of November at Lake Sebu on Mindanao, this T'boli festival culminates in the royal sport of horse-fighting.

December

Christmas Lantern Festival On the closest Saturday to Christmas, truly gigantic Christmas lanterns are paraded through San Fernando (Pampanga) on Luzon; the lanterns remain on display until January.

Shariff Kabungsuwan Festival (p396) This December festival in Cotabato on Mindanao celebrates the arrival of Islam in the region and includes river parades of decorated boats.

Muslim Holy Days

According to Islamic belief, the day actually begins at sunset, so holidays technically begin the evening before the solar-calendar dates given here. Dates may also vary a bit from what's written: the Islamic calendar is an approximation, and the actual start of Ramadan and other months are determined by the proper sighting of the moon. Most holy days are observed only in the Muslim parts of Mindanao, though some are now

national holidays in an attempt to make Muslim Filipinos feel part of the nation.

Hari Raya Hajj 29 December 2006 to 1 January 2007; 18 December to 21 December 2007

Hijra New Year 20 January 2007; 10 January 2008

Maulod An Nabi (Prophet's Birthday) 10 April 2006; 31 March 2007

Ramadan 24 September to 23 October 2006; 13 September to 12 October 2007

Hari Raya Puasa (Feast of the Breaking of the Fast) Begins on the last evening of Ramadan and may last for three days.

FOOD

For information about eating and drinking in the Philippines, see the Food & Drink chapter (p45).

GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELLERS

Homosexuality is generally out in the open, with *bakla* or *bading* (gay men) and *tombay* (lesbians) generally accepted by society at large.

There are gay cruising places in Manila, such as particular shopping malls and movie houses, but you should be wary of police (or con-men masquerading as police) and hustlers. Remedios Circle in Malate is a lively gay area, and lodging in the neighbourhood is usually gay friendly. A gay beauty pageant is held here annually. The Gay Pride March in June also takes place around the Circle.

Online gay and lesbian resources for the Philippines include **Utopia Asian Gay & Lesbian Resources** (www.utopia-asia.com).

HOLIDAYS

Many businesses shut for the entire week before Easter (called 'Holy Week' here) and for two weeks (or more) over Christmas and New Year's. Expect overseas consulates and many embassies to take some time off during these periods as well.

New Year's Day 1 January

People Power Day 25 February

Maunder Thursday Varies; around March or April

Good Friday Varies; the day after Maunder Thursday

Araw ng Kagitingan (Bataan Day) 9 April

Labour Day 1 May

Independence Day 12 June

Ninoy Aquino Day 21 August

National Heroes Day Last Sunday in August

All Saints' Day 1 November

End of Ramadan Varies; depends on Islamic calendar

Bonifacio Day 30 November

Christmas Day 25 December
Rizal Day 30 December
New Year's Eve 31 December

INSURANCE

A travel-insurance policy to cover theft, loss and medical problems is a good idea. Some policies offer lower and higher medical-expense options. There is a wide variety of policies available, so check the small print. Some policies specifically exclude 'dangerous activities', which can include scuba diving, motorcycling and even trekking. Check that the policy covers ambulances and an emergency flight home. See the Health chapter (p456) for more on health issues in the Philippines. See the Transport chapter (p446) for information on car insurance in the Philippines.

Worldwide cover to travellers from more than 44 countries is available online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

INTERNET ACCESS

Email and Internet services have taken off in a big way in the Philippines, and plenty of hotels, resorts and cybercafés will allow you to keep in touch with the virtual outside world. Even many of the smallest towns and islands have email facilities.

Rates for email/Internet access can be as low as P20 per hour, particularly in Cebu City, where there seems to be a cybercafé at every other street corner. There are plenty of cybercafés, or Internet cafés, as the locals call them, in cities and big towns, and generally connections are fast and efficient.

If you've got a portable computer for this purpose, note the voltage used (see p432 for details). US-style RJ-11 telephone adaptors are commonly used in the Philippines, so ensure that you at least have a US RJ-11 adaptor that works with your modem.

See p17 for some useful websites on the Philippines.

LEGAL MATTERS

Should you find yourself in trouble with the law in the Philippines, your first recourse is your embassy, so make a point of writing down the phone number as a protective measure. Some of the embassies and consulates in the Philippines are listed on p437.

Though drug use or smuggling does not automatically carry the death penalty in the

Philippines, as it does in some other South-east Asian countries, it's nonetheless a very serious offence. In fact, depending on the type and amount of drugs that offenders are caught with, they can still end up on death row.

If you do get into trouble in the Philippines, after contacting your embassy you may also want to contact a lawyer. Almost all lawyers in the Philippines speak good English, so communication should not be an issue.

If you find yourself the victim of theft or some other crime you can either seek help at the nearest police station or call the 24-hour service provided by the **Philippine Department of Tourism** (DOT; ☎ 02-524 1660 in Manila).

MAPS

For a map of the entire country, the best of the lot is probably Nelles Verlag's 1:1,500,000 scale *Philippines*. For local travel, E-Z Maps (published by United Tourist Promotions) produces a series of maps on several of the country's bigger cities and some islands. E-Z also produces an A4-size travel atlas of the Philippines which is useful for anyone planning to drive around the country. The Nelles map is available internationally; the E-Z Maps are best picked up once you arrive. See p71 for information on maps of Manila.

MONEY

The unit of currency in the Philippines is the peso (P), which is also spelled *peso* in Filipino, and 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.

The smartest way to bring cash to the Philippines is in the form of a credit card, cash card or debit card. Provided you have your PIN, you can use these to get cash or cash advances from thousands of banks and ATMs in the Philippines (but don't expect to find these in rural areas – always stock up on cash before leaving a city).

Of course, you'll want to back up your plastic with some cash (US dollars are the most widely accepted) and travellers cheques. Using plastic with a cash back-up will save you from having to deal with local

moneychangers, who seem to have made a science out of ripping off tourists; Lonely Planet receives stacks of letters and emails each year from victims of these schemes – don't say you weren't warned!

There's a bewildering array of banks operating in the Philippines, so look around before deciding which to use. The Philippine National Bank (PNB), Equitable PCI Bank, Metrobank, Rizal Commercial Banking Corporation (RCBC) and Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI) are some of the big names in local banking. Global banks, such as Citibank and HSBC (Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation), also provide consumer-banking services in the Philippines.

ATMs

Credit, debit and cash cards can be used to get cash or cash advances from thousands of ATMs throughout the country. Check with your bank or credit-card company (or look on the back of your card) to see which ATM network your card is connected to. For getting cash, Cirrus and Plus are the most widely accepted; for cash advances, MasterCard is the most widely accepted, followed by Visa.

Cash advances from ATMs are in local currency, and may be subject to a daily withdrawal limit. Metrobank and Equitable PCI ATMs have cash withdrawal limits of P4000 and P5000, respectively. HSBC machines have no limits – you're only limited by your own bank's daily withdrawal limit.

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. Note that ATMs in the Philippines have a curious system of posting 'online' or 'offline' signs to indicate whether or not the machine is in operation.

Cash

With the usual precautions, carrying cash (US dollars is the currency of choice) is no particular problem; it's actually a good idea to have a US\$50 and/or US\$100 note stashed somewhere secure and accessible in case you can't find a bank or an ATM, or you're out of travellers cheques.

As for pesos, 'Sorry, no change' becomes a familiar line – stock up on notes smaller than P100 at every opportunity.

Credit Cards

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 (Palawan, in particular, has few places that accept credit cards).

A shop-front sign that reads 'Visa accepted' or 'MasterCard accepted' may well refer only to the Philippines-issued version, so check with the shop personnel by showing them your card. 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. You may be able to avoid this charge by using another card.

If your MasterCard is lost, stolen or eaten by an ungrateful ATM, the toll-free number to call in the Philippines is ☎ 1 800 1111 0061. For Visa cardholders, the number is ☎ 1 800 1111 0248. Be forewarned, however, that trying to get through to a 1 800 number in the Philippines can be as fruitless as trying to reach somebody in the middle of the Sahara!

There are incidents of credit-card fraud in the Philippines, as in many other countries. To prevent this, keep a close eye on your card at all times – never, for example, allow a shop clerk to disappear into a back room with it (where someone would be able to make several imprints with your card). Likewise, keep a careful record of all your credit-card transactions while in the Philippines, save your receipts, and check your credit-card statements.

You can get cash advances with credit cards from many ATMs and banks in the Philippines. Note that this is different from simply getting cash from your account with a cash or debit card – a cash advance is like a credit-card purchase in that you must pay it back, and with interest if you don't pay your account in full each month. Also keep in mind that there may not be any ATMs or banks in smaller towns and rural areas, so, as usual, it pays to cash up (within reasonable limits) before heading into the sticks.

While many ATMs in the Philippines accept cash cards linked to the Cirrus

and Plus networks, far fewer are linked to international credit-card networks, such as MasterCard and Visa. If the ATM in question does not accept your credit card, it may still be possible to get an over-the-counter cash advance from the bank. However, this can be a slow and tedious procedure.

Equitable PCI Banks will issue cash advances for most major cards, including MasterCard and Visa, so this is usually a good bet, but be warned that only one branch in your town is likely to offer this service, so you may have to travel to find the correct branch.

Moneychangers

Moneychangers are usually easy to find in the commercial centres 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 travellers cheques at a bank, hotel or resort, even if the rate is usually lower than at a moneychanger.

In Manila you should have no trouble changing US dollars, British pounds or euros; Japanese yen is also widely accepted, as are Canadian and Australian dollars, ASEAN currencies, and some currencies from the Middle East.

There are no particular hassles with exchanging pesos when you leave, unless you're carrying a huge amount. But even then your only problem might be locating a moneychanger with enough US dollars to change them into.

Tipping

Tipping (about 5% to 10%) in the Philippines is expected, though not demanded, mainly in restaurants, where it's a component of the staff's wages. Round up taxi fares (for example, from P164 to P170), assuming the meter is correct.

Travellers Cheques

US-dollar travellers cheques are the most secure and reliable way to carry funds. American Express (AmEx) is by far the most widely recognised and you may find it difficult to exchange cheques from other

companies. An instant replacement policy on lost or stolen cheques is highly desirable, so check that the company will honour this policy in the Philippines before you buy.

Cashing travellers cheques is best done at a bank, although this can be time-consuming. Most places charge a small fee to cash travellers cheques – ask about the fee beforehand and decide how many cheques you want to cash at one time.

In principle, changing travellers cheques is quite simple: you only need to bring along your passport and the original purchase receipts. In practice though, banks and moneychangers can be reluctant to accept travellers cheques, so to minimise hassles it's wise to plan your money conversions in towns with a couple of exchange options.

Even in a city such as Manila, only a handful of banks and moneychangers change travellers cheques in currencies other than US dollars. Outside the big cities, US dollars are generally the only currency accepted, either for cash or travellers cheques, though the Japanese yen is gaining greater acceptance as an alternative to the greenback. The rate is generally slightly lower for travellers cheques than for cash.

PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

It's a good idea to bring your own slide film, as it's probably 'fresher' than the film available in the Philippines. Print film spends less time on shop shelves so it should be more reliable, but it's better to stock up where you can. Kodak Ektachrome EPP 120 costs P180 while Kodak Ektachrome EPP 135-36 is priced at P290.

Fast and reliable one-hour film processing is available in Manila and major cities for approximately P5.50 per print plus a P50 developing charge; cheaper processing takes longer. Slide processing is available only at some professional labs.

POST

The postal system is generally efficient – even from provincial towns, mail tends to get to where it is intended to go. Just don't tempt fate by enclosing cash (or, if you must send it, sandwich it between two pieces of carbon paper so it's not visible when the envelope is held against the light). If you're nervous about stamps falling off or being removed, have the items franked instead.

SHOPPING

Manila's malls and markets offer a range of authentic items from around the country, and lots of touristy trinkets as well. Handicrafts are popular and often of high quality; they include wooden salad bowls and utensils, and hanging lamps and chandeliers made of shells.

Items designed for tourists are especially plentiful in Manila's traditional tourist belt – Ermita and Malate – as well as in the huge air-conditioned malls where you can find virtually anything. Many well-known designer brands from the West, such as Polo, Armani and Guess, have shops at these malls. Here you can pick up brand-name clothing at a fraction of its cost in the West. The Barong Tagalog, the traditional embroidered shirt worn by Filipino men, is also a good buy.

Philippine markets are a must-see, if only to experience the amazing riot of colours and delightful cacophony of sounds. The fruit section will make you want to sample the many types of bananas, mangoes and other tropical fruits on display.

You can find markets of varying sizes in almost all Philippine cities and towns. Some are held only once or twice a week – ask a local for advice.

Traditional items can be found in cities such as Cebu, Davao and Zamboanga, or you could go to the source. The pickings are often better off the beaten track: Tacloban on Leyte is famous for the quality of its *abaca* (native hemp plant) products, Iligan on Mindanao has a good range of Muslim-produced handicrafts, while Lake Sebu is the heartland of the T'boli people and their weaving and betel-nut box-making.

Bargaining

Try bargaining in shops and markets, as Filipinos do. After all, foreigners are often quoted higher prices. However, as with anywhere else, it pays to remain good-natured. It's also best not to try to drive too hard a bargain. If you can't get the price you want, graciously decline to do business and excuse yourself. Remember, bargaining too hard or too aggressively will cause the vendor to lose face. And it's a good idea to keep in mind how much money you're actually bargaining for – it may seem like a lot in pesos, but when you convert it to your own currency, it may be a pittance.

In department stores and shopping malls, fixed prices are just that.

SOLO TRAVELLERS

The Philippines is a good country for solo travellers. The only caveat here is that some foreign female travellers, particularly solo ones, have reported problems in the conservative Muslim areas of the south. If you are worried about this, you will probably feel safer in places like Boracay or Cebu, where the locals are very used to foreign women travelling by themselves.

TELEPHONE & FAX

In much of the Philippines, landlines are very rare indeed, and mobile (cell) phones are the only way to contact the outside world. And, of course, in some places, you can't get mobile-phone service at all (but isn't this half the reason for travelling to an outer island?).

In Manila and other big cities the Philippine Long Distance Telephone Company (PLDT) provides acceptable long-distance services.

Within Luzon you should now be able to reach most numbers directly, though calls to/from far-flung areas like Samar can often only be placed through the operator, and this depends on being able to reach the operator in the first place! The number for the PLDT domestic operator is % 109 (% 108 for international); for directory assistance in Manila, call % 114 (% 112 for area/country code or regional inquiries). Those numbers only work if you're calling from a PLDT phone. You can't access the PLDT operator or directory inquiries from a non-PLDT phone.

Midrange hotels often have International/Domestic Direct Dialing (IDD/DDDD) phones in their rooms, but if you're averse to paying the (usually usurious) hotel surcharge, you can make your calls from a payphone in the foyer (lobby) or outside the hotel. In the provinces there are few private or public phones and you can only make or receive calls at your hotel or at the local branch of the main phone companies.

IDD phone calls are cheaper to make than operator-assisted calls, and both PLDT and BayanTel offer a flat rate of US\$0.40 per minute to anywhere around the world, regardless of what time you make the call.

At times it may be better to call reverse-charges (collect) rather than pay for a call

locally. PLDT's Country Direct service puts you through to an operator in the country you are calling, who will then place your call for you. Dial % 105 (% 10-10-500 for the USA) to enter the system, then the required country code (commonly used codes are listed in phone boxes). The service is available to over 40 destinations worldwide.

Mobile Phones

Now carried by legions of Filipinos, mobile (cell) phones are commonplace in the Philippines. If your phone company offers international roaming for the Philippines, you should be able to use your mobile phone (provided it's a relatively new model) and home SIM card in the Philippines, but check the roaming charges as they may be many times higher than Philippine rates.

In fact, you just might be better off buying a mobile phone locally. In big cities you can pick up a unit with text and other functions for as little as P3000, and that includes a SIM card and a prepaid call card. Globe and Smart are the two frontrunners in the local mobile-phone market. The stiff competition between these service providers works to the advantage of consumers – calls can cost as little as P6.50 a minute. Text messaging costs only P2 to send.

Mobile-phone charges can be paid each month or with a prepaid card. Like phone-cards, these come in various denominations and are readily available at phone kiosks in shopping centres. You may also purchase electronic load (e-load) at designated outlets, often even at local *sari-sari* stores, for as low as P30. Locally purchased mobile phones can make IDD/DDD calls as well as receive calls from outside the country. International rates for mobile phone calls are so low that mobiles can actually be the cheapest way to make international calls from the Philippines.

Phonecards

Coin-operated phones have become rare in Manila, but card-operated phones are widely available in hotel foyers, commercial centres and shopping malls. Phonecards can be purchased from vending machines or kiosks in practically any shopping area, and come in various denominations, the most common of which is P100.

PLDT and the other phone companies issue phonecards, but these can be only used

in the company's own phones, so make sure you get the card you want. If only because PLDT phones are more widely available, it's probably best to buy a PLDT Fonkard Plus card. PLDT claims you can use the card to call from PLDT payphones nationwide. Phonecards can be used to make IDD and DDD calls from public payphones, but make sure you have the right denomination to avoid the hassle of getting suddenly cut off.

TIME

The Philippines is eight hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time/Universal Time Coordinated (GMT/UTC). Thus, when it's noon in Manila, it's 8pm the previous evening in Los Angeles and 11pm the previous night in New York; 4am the same day in London; 1pm the same day in Tokyo; and 2pm the same day in Sydney.

Official time in Davao, Mindanao's capital, is curiously about 10 minutes ahead of the rest of the country. No-one's quite sure how or why it happened, but no-one seems too troubled about it.

TOILETS

A toilet is referred to as a 'comfort room' (CR). In Filipino, men are *lalake* and women are *babae*. Where there are no public toilets, Filipino men will often avail themselves of the nearest outdoor wall – hence the signs scrawled in many places: 'Bawal Ang Umihl Dito!' ('No Pissing Here!'), though nowadays in Manila there are small walled urinals along the main streets (you can tell them by their screaming pink paint). If you need a toilet, try a mall or fast-food restaurant.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The official organ of Philippine tourism is the Philippine Department of Tourism (DOT). The main DOT centre in Manila (p75) has helpful staff, but you don't need to load up with brochures and computer printouts – regional outlets stock the same information and may be more up to date.

You'll find regional DOT offices in many of the more popular destinations throughout the Philippines, although some offices offer more useful services than others.

Tourist Offices Abroad

Australia Sydney (% 02-9283 0711; Level 1, Philippine Centre, 27-33 Wentworth Ave, Sydney, NSW 2000)

Canada Toronto (% 416-924 3569; www.wowphilippines.ca; 151 Bloor Street, West Suite 1120, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1S4)

France Paris (% 331 42 65 02 34; c/o Philippines Embassy, 3 Faubourg Saint Honoré, 75008 Paris)

Germany Frankfurt (% 4969-2089394; Level 1, Kaiserhofstrasse 7, D-60313 Frankfurt am Main)

UK London (% 44207-835 1100; www.wowphilippines.co.uk; c/o Philippine Embassy, 146 Cromwell Rd, London SW7 4EF)

USA Chicago (% 312-782 2475; Suite 913, 30 North Michigan Ave, Chicago IL 60602); Los Angeles (% 213-487 4525; Suite 216, 3660 Wilshire Blvd, Los Angeles, CA 90010); New York (% 212-575 7915; 556 5th Ave, New York, NY 10036); San Francisco (% 415-956 4060; Suite 507, 447 Sutter St, San Francisco, CA 94108)

VISAS

Visa regulations in the Philippines are subject to change so be sure to check with a Philippine embassy or consulate before making your travel plans (see p437 for a list of embassies and consulates).

At the time of writing, citizens of nearly all countries did not need a visa to enter the Philippines for stays of less than 22 days – you'll be given a 21-day visa on arrival in the country. However, you may well be asked for proof of an exit or onward ticket upon arrival in the country (see right).

For longer stays, before you travel apply at a Philippine embassy or consulate for a three-month single-entry visa, which usually costs US\$30. Multiple-entry visas valid for up to six or twelve months are also available (\$60 or \$90 respectively), but you'll still be limited to 59-day stays.

Most Philippine embassies and consulates won't issue you a visa without proof of a ticket for onward travel from the Philippines. Usually, a photocopy of your itinerary from your travel agent is enough, but some ask to see the actual ticket.

Visa Extensions

If you want to stay beyond the 21 or 59 days you've been given on arrival, you'll have to deal with a local immigration office. Fortunately, you can now buy your way past a lot of the red tape with a P500 'express fee', which may be pricey but it ensures that your application is processed in only a few hours, rather than the usual five to seven days.

Currently, 21-day visas can be extended to 59 days for P2020. Longer extensions (up

to a maximum of six months) are possible, with correspondingly higher fees. You'll need photocopies of the identity page and the Philippine entry stamp from your passport, and you may need to show an onward ticket.

Manila's massive Bureau of Immigration (Map p76; % 02-527 3265; Magallanes Dr; 11 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) squats between the Pasig River and the Intramuros city walls. A visit to this imposing edifice is a formal occasion: casual clothes, such as shorts and singlets, are prohibited – flip-flops (thongs) are also a bad fashion statement – and you'll need proof of identity to enter the building.

Visa extensions from 21 to 59 days can often be handled faster by the regional immigration offices in San Fernando (La Union) and Cebu City, but remember to dress for success.

Onward Tickets

Officially, you must have a ticket for onward travel to enter the Philippines. This applies both to those who apply for visas before arriving in the Philippines and those who hope to receive a 21-day visa on arrival. In practice, immigration inspectors at the airport don't always ask to see an onward ticket.

WOMEN TRAVELLERS

Foreign women travellers will generally have few problems in most of the Philippines. However, in the south, in conservative Muslim places like Mindanao, women travellers may face unwelcome sexual advances. It is extremely unlikely to go further than this, however, and one solution is to announce that you are in fact 'a widow' (being 'married' isn't a deterrent).

Women travellers should also be aware that tampons are not widely available in the Philippines (pads are more commonly used and are more commonly available). If you use tampons, be sure to bring an adequate supply from home.

WORK

Nonresident aliens are not permitted to be employed or to theoretically look for work without a valid work permit, while foreign residents require work registration. Contact the Department of Labor & Employment (DOLE; Map p76; % 02-527 8000; www.dole.gov.ph; DOLE Bldg, General Luna St cnr Muralla St, Intramuros, Manila) to obtain either a work permit or registration.

Transport

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TRANSPORT

TRANSPORT

THINGS CHANGE

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change: prices for international travel are volatile, routes are introduced and cancelled, schedules change, special deals come and go, and rules and visa requirements are amended. You should check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Most people enter the Philippines at Manila's Ninoy Aquino International Airport (NAIA). This is a dismal introduction to the country: lines are often long at immigration, and the entire facility is in need of a facelift. That said, once you clear the

lines immigration is usually straightforward. You may be asked to show an ongoing ticket, and most nationalities are issued a 21-day visa on the spot (see p445 for more details).

Flights, tours and train tickets can be booked online at www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services.

AIR Airports & Airlines

Since most people fly to the Philippines and most flights land in Manila, **Ninoy Aquino International Airport** (NAIA; Map p84; % 02-877 1109; <http://203.160.183.226/miaa>) in Parañaque, is likely to be your first taste of the Philippines. Too bad, but don't despair – most of the country is a lot better run than decrepit old NAIA. Doubtless as an incentive for people to fly with Philippine Airlines (PAL), the national carrier, its passengers get exclusive use of the nicer Centennial Terminal (NAIA II).

Cebu City's Mactan-Cebu International Airport (MCIA; Map p243; % 032-340 2486; www.mactan-cebuairport.com.ph) is the country's second-busiest airport and is much better. Depending on your itinerary, Cebu's airport may also be a more practical entry or exit point. The biggest advantage of flying into Cebu is that it saves you having to deal with the chaos of Manila (and its unscrupulous taxi drivers). Cebu has international connections to Hong Kong with Cathay Pacific, Kuala Lumpur (via Kota Kinabalu) with Malaysian Airlines, Singapore with SilkAir, and Hong Kong, Tokyo and Seoul with Philippine Airlines. Since all these cities are well served with international connections, it's easy for the determined traveller to arrive in Cebu rather than Manila.

Another airport in the Philippines with regular international connections is **Francisco Bangoy International Airport (DVO)** in Davao on Mindanao, which has flights to and from Singapore with SilkAir.

Previously confined to cargo, the **Diosdado Macapagal International Airport (DMIA, formerly Clark)** in Angeles City now handles international flights by Air-Asia (to and from Kota Kinabalu and Kuala

Lumpur, Malaysia), Tiger Airways (to and from Singapore), and CR Airways (to and from Hong Kong).

AIRLINES FLYING TO & FROM THE PHILIPPINES

Air France (AF; % 02-887 1202; www.airfrance.com; hub Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris)

Air Macau (NX; % 02-243 3111; <http://en.airmacau.com.mo>; hub Macau International Airport, Macau)

Air Niugini (PX; % 02-891 3339; www.airniugini.com.pg; hub Port Moresby Jacksons International Airport, Port Moresby)

Air Philippines (2P; % 02-851 7601; www.airphils.com; hub Ninoy Aquino International Airport, Manila)

Asiana Airlines (OZ; % 02-892 5688; <http://us.flyasiana.com>; hub Incheon International Airport, Seoul)

Cathay Pacific (CX; % 02-757 0888; www.cathaypacific.com; hub Hong Kong International Airport, Hong Kong)

Cebu Pacific Air (5J; % 02-636 4938; www.cebupacificair.com; hub Mactan-Cebu International Airport, Lapu-Lapu City, Mactan Island)

China Airlines (CI; % 02-521 9331; www.china-airlines.com/en; hub Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport, Taoyuan)

China Southern Airlines (CZ; % 02-551 3333; www.cs-air.com/en; hub Baiyun International Airport, Guangzhou)

Continental Airlines (CO; % 02-818 8701; www.continental.com; hub Houston Intercontinental Airport, Houston)

Emirates (EK; % 02-811 5278; www.emirates.com; hub Dubai International Airport, Dubai)

EVA Air (BR; % 02-864 3800; www.evaair.com/html/b2c/english; hub Chiang Kai-Shek International Airport, Taoyuan)

Gulf Air (GF; % 02-817 8383; www.gulfairco.com; hub Bahrain International Airport, Bahrain)

Japan Airlines (JL; % 02-886 6868; www.jal.co.jp/en; hub Narita Airport, Tokyo)

KLM (KL; % 02-887 1202; www.klm.com; hub Schiphol Airport, Amsterdam)

Korean Air (KE; % 02-817 6668; www.koreanair.com; hub Incheon International Airport, Seoul)

Kuwait Airways (KU; % 02-812 9579; www.kuwait-airways.com/en; hub Kuwait International Airport, Kuwait)

Lufthansa Airlines (LH; % 02-580 6400; www.lufthansa.com; hub Frankfurt Main Airport, Frankfurt)

Malaysia Airlines (MH; % 02-525 9404; www.malaysiaairlines.com; hub Kuala Lumpur)

Northwest Airlines (NW; % 02-521 1928; www.nwa.com; hub Minneapolis-St Paul International Airport, Minneapolis)

Orient Thai Airlines (OX; www.fly12go.com; hub Chiang Mai International Airport, Chiang Mai)

Philippine Airlines (PR; % 02-817 1234; www.philippineairlines.com; hub Manila Ninoy Aquino International Airport, Manila)

Qantas (QF; % 02-812 0607; www.qantas.com; hub Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport, Sydney)

Qatar Airways (QR; % 02-812 1888; www.qatarairways.com; hub Doha International Airport, Qatar)

Royal Brunei (BI; % 02-897 3309; www.bruneiair.com; hub Brunei International Airport, Brunei)

Saudi Arabian Airlines (SV; % 02-896 3046; www.saudiairlines.com; hub King Abdulaziz International Airport, Jeddah)

Thai Airways International (TG; % 02-812 4744; www.thaiair.com; hub Bangkok International Airport, Bangkok)

Tickets

Book well in advance if you plan to arrive in the Philippines during December – expat Filipinos flood the islands to visit their families during Christmas and New Year. If you're flying into Cebu, the lead-up to Lunar New Year in late January or early February can also get congested, as the city's sizeable Chinese population prepares to celebrate.

INTERCONTINENTAL (RTW) TICKETS

If you're planning an extended trip with stops in several countries, a round-the-world (RTW) ticket may be your best bet. Check with the travel agencies listed in the following sections for the best deals on RTW tickets. Alternatively, check the websites of major international airlines such as Qantas, British Airways and American Airlines to see if there are any RTW specials on offer to Web surfers.

Another option from the US west coast is a Circle Pacific ticket, which allows you to hop around the Pacific and Asia.

Australia

The best place to look for cheap fares is in the travel sections of weekend newspapers, such as the *Age* in Melbourne and the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Two well-known agencies for cheap fares are STA

INTERNATIONAL DEPARTURE TAX

Departure tax for all flights leaving the Philippines is P550, payable in cash only (US dollars or Philippine pesos).

Travel (☎ 1300 733 035 Australia-wide; www.statravel.com.au), which has offices in all major cities, and **Flight Centre** (☎ 133 133 Australia-wide; www.flightcentre.com.au), which has dozens of offices throughout Australia.

Qantas and PAL offer the only direct flights from Australia to the Philippines (Sydney to Manila); otherwise, it's necessary to fly via cities such as Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or Hong Kong.

Canada

Travel Cuts (☎ 800-667-2887; www.travelcuts.com) is Canada's national student travel agency. For online bookings try www.expedia.ca and www.travelocity.ca.

United and PAL fly between Canada and Manila. Alternatively, it's possible to fly from Vancouver to Manila or Cebu via several Asian cities on a variety of airlines.

Continental Europe

Air France offers direct flights from Paris to Manila; otherwise, you can fly via an Asian or Middle Eastern capital. The cheapest return fares are on the Middle Eastern carriers.

Lufthansa offers direct flights from Frankfurt to Manila (stopping in Bangkok). Otherwise, it's necessary to take a connecting flight via an Asian or Middle Eastern capital on Malaysia Airlines, Singapore Airlines or Qatar Airways.

There are direct flights from Amsterdam to Manila on KLM, and connecting flights on Cathay Pacific (via Hong Kong), Swiss Air (via Zurich), Singapore Airlines (via Singapore) and Malaysia Airlines (via Kuala Lumpur), among others.

Some recommended travel agencies in continental Europe include:

FRANCE

AnyWay (☎ 0892 893 892; www.anyway.fr)

Lastminute (☎ 0892 705 000; www.lastminute.fr)

Nouvelles Frontières (☎ 0825 000 747; www.nouvelles-frontieres.fr)

OTU Voyages (www.otu.fr) This agency specialises in student and youth travellers.

Voyageurs du Monde (☎ 01 40 15 11 15; www.vdm.com)

GERMANY

Expedia (www.expedia.de)

Just Travel (☎ 089 747 3330; www.justtravel.de)

Lastminute (☎ 01805 284 366; www.lastminute.de)

STA Travel (☎ 01805 456 422; www.statravel.de) For travellers under the age of 26.

ITALY

CTS Viaggi (☎ 06 462 0431; www.cts.it)

NETHERLANDS

Airfair (☎ 020 620 5121; www.airfair.nl)

SPAIN

Barcelo Viajes (☎ 902 116 226; www.barceloviajes.com)

New Zealand

Both Flight Centre (☎ 0800 243 544; www.flightcentre.co.nz) and **STA Travel** (☎ 0508 782 872; www.statravel.co.nz) have branches throughout New Zealand.

Currently there are no direct flights between New Zealand and the Philippines; the usual route is to fly to Sydney and pick up a direct flight from there. Alternatively, it's possible to fly direct from New Zealand to an Asian city like Singapore or Hong Kong and fly to the Philippines from there.

Return fares on Singapore Airlines (via Singapore) or Malaysia Airlines (via Kuala Lumpur) are popular choices for flights between New Zealand and the Philippines.

UK & Ireland

The cheapest flights to Manila are usually with Qatar Airways. Other carriers flying between the UK and the Philippines include Air France, or Asian airlines such as Singapore Airlines or Cathay Pacific. Malaysia Airlines, Cathay Pacific and Singapore Airlines also offer flights into Cebu for slightly higher prices.

Recommended travel agencies include the following:

Flight Centre (☎ 0870 890 8099; www.flightcentre.co.uk)

Flightbookers (☎ 0870 010 7000; www.ebookers.com)

North-South Travel (☎ 01245 608 291; www.northsouthtravel.co.uk) North-South Travel donate part of their profit to projects in the developing world.

Quest Travel (☎ 0870 442 3542; www.questtravel.com)

STA Travel (☎ 0870 160 0599; www.statravel.co.uk) For travellers under the age of 26.

Trailfinders (www.trailfinders.co.uk)

Travel Bag (☎ 0870 890 1456; www.travelbag.co.uk)

USA

PAL offers the only direct flights to the Philippines from mainland USA, with flights from both Los Angeles and San Francisco. Other airlines that serve the Philippines from the USA include Northwest (via Tokyo), Japan Airlines (via Tokyo), All Nippon Airways (via Tokyo), Korean Airlines (via Seoul) and China Airlines (via Taipei).

The following are recommended for on-line bookings.

Cheap Tickets (www.cheaptickets.com)

Expedia (www.expedia.com)

Lowestfare.com (www.lowestfare.com)

Orbitz (www.orbitz.com)

STA (www.sta.com)

Travelocity (www.travelocity.com)

SEA

It's possible to travel by sea between the Philippines and nearby parts of Malaysia and Indonesia. However, schedules and routes are very liable to change so it's best to be flexible in your plans.

Indonesia

EPA Shipping Line (☎ 083-380 3591) has ferries that sail between General Santos in Mindanao and the deep-water port of Bitung, 55km from Manado, Indonesia (P1800, 36 hours, twice weekly). The office is inside the port compound at Makar, near General Santos. This is a cargo boat that takes passengers; officially, foreigners should be able to make this trip, but you may want to check with the tourism office in General Santos first. You will need to get your visa requirements in order with the Indonesian consulate in Davao before you leave. For more details see p394.

There is also a boat that sails between Bitung and Davao's Sasa Pier (via General Santos) every Friday, but trip details change often so it's best to check with Davao's city tourism office. For more details see p391.

Malaysia

Aleson Lines (☎ 062-991 2687; PPA Terminal, Port Area, Zamboanga) boats leave Zamboanga in Mindanao for Sandakan in Malaysian Borneo twice weekly (cabin P3600, 16 hours). For details see p400.

SRN Fastcraft (☎ 992 3765) has two Weesam Express boats a week between Zamboanga

and Sandakan (P5400, eight hours). For more details see p400.

TOURS

For information on tours of the Philippines, see p455.

GETTING AROUND

AIR

The main domestic carriers are Philippine Airlines (PAL), Cebu Pacific Air and Air Philippines. Smaller carriers include Asian Spirit, SEAIR and Island Transvoyaer (only for El Nido in Palawan). For Manila contact details, see p109.

Size is important when it comes to Philippine air travel. Smaller airlines fly smaller planes, and smaller airports have more basic facilities. You're more likely to get on a flight during popular travel times with a bigger airline; on the other hand, the smaller planes often land (or at least try to) when the big planes turn back or stay on the ground. Generally speaking, PAL flies the largest and newest planes.

Flight routes tend to be skewed towards the major airports, so airlines can fly from busy Airport X to towns A, B and C, but not necessarily *between* A, B and C. Routes in the southern Philippines are particularly hit-and-miss.

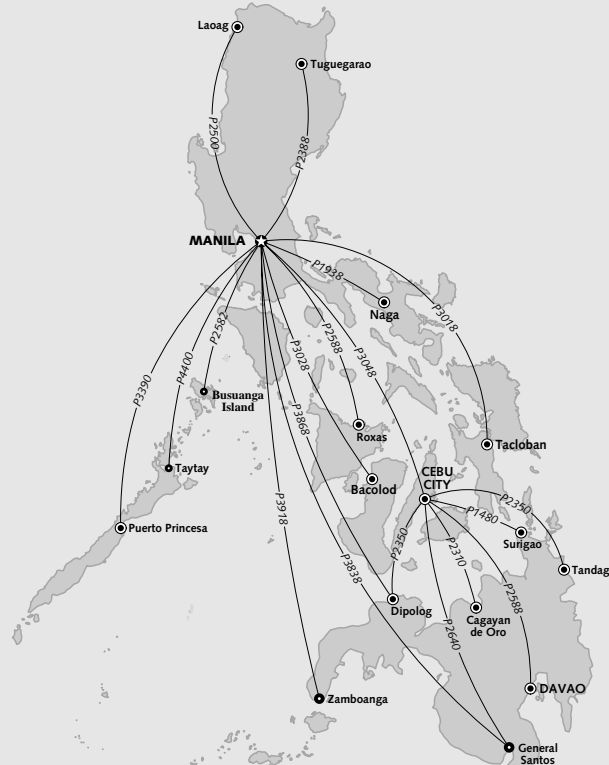
Reasonably reliable flight information, as well as online booking, is available online from airline websites and travel sites such as www.lakbay.net. All domestic carriers have roughly comparable fares, and on certain routes you can get promotional (ie seasonal) discounts of 20% to 30% if you buy your ticket two or three days in advance (check with the airline for exact details). Schedules and prices change, and promotions rapidly come and go. See the Domestic Airfares map (above) for airfares, but please note that these prices were only approximate at the time of printing and are subject to change.

DOMESTIC DEPARTURE TAX

Domestic departure tax varies from airport to airstrip. From Manila and Cebu it is P100. Domestic departure tax at most small airports is lower, generally around P50.

DOMESTIC AIRFARES

0 400 km
0 250 miles



It's best to book in advance, but don't plan too tight a schedule – flight delays are a fact of life in the Philippines. During the wet season, schedules can be erratic due to the weather. If there is a typhoon warning, most flights will be grounded; few ferries will venture out of harbours either, so you may just have to wait it out. You can bank

on the first few flights following a typhoon being massively overbooked. There's also the risk of smaller airlines cancelling flights at the last minute if not enough passengers show up at the airport or airfield.

Christmas, New Year, Holy Week (the week culminating in Easter) and All Saints' Day/All Souls' Day (1/2 November) are the

most heavily booked periods. Wherever you go, be sure to reconfirm your flight, though this isn't always a guarantee against being bumped.

BICYCLE

Cycling around the Philippines is a seldom-explored option, but away from the treacherous traffic and exhaust fumes it can be a great way to get around the quieter, less visited islands such as the Batanes or Guimaras. Locals get around on bikes in many of these places, and the promise of peaceful rides along coastal and mountain roads to out-of-the-way villages makes cycling well worth the effort.

You can take bicycles on domestic flights (you may have to partially disassemble the bicycle), but take heed of the baggage allowance on small planes. If there's room, you can stow your bike on a bus or jeepney, usually for a small charge.

Hire

As guesthouses and resorts realise the virtues of hiring out bicycles, self-powered transport is getting easier to come by on some islands. Depending on where you are, mountain bikes go for around P300 per day.

Purchase

Purchasing a bicycle locally is no better or worse than anywhere else in the world. In the big cities you will most likely find a bicycle shop or two in major shopping centres, though, unlike in most other Southeast Asian countries, there are very few commuters on bicycles, hence prices tend to be a bit higher.

BOAT

Spend any length of time in the Philippines and you're bound to find yourself on a boat. Boats range from the high-class multideck WG&A ferries and highly efficient luxury passenger catamarans (known as fastcraft or fast ferries) to the smallest of outriggers (called bangka or pumpboats), which shuttle between myriad beaches and piers.

Ferry & Fastcraft

Ferries of all descriptions and levels of seaworthiness ply the waters between islands. They are often overcrowded; cramming every inch of leaky tubs with passengers

doesn't make them watertight, but it does increase the probability of the ship sinking, especially in heavy seas. You often have options as to which boat to travel on, so ask around about reliable companies and ferries and plan accordingly.

Fastcraft are becoming an increasingly common sight between islands. These are smaller, lighter and newer than the ferries, and are well fitted, reliable and safe. They aren't called fastcraft for nothing, as they can cut long rides by half. One modern convenience used to excess on these spiffy ships is air-conditioning, which is permanently set to 'arctic' – take a sweater or fleece.

Though service on the main routes is pretty reliable, you'll need to be prepared for changes in the itinerary. Adverse weather conditions (especially during the typhoon season) or renovation of a ferry can totally alter the sailing times and boats used for various trips. As with planes, boats fill to overflowing during Christmas, New Year, Holy Week and All Saints' Day/All Souls' Day, as well as to the locations of major festivals.

On board, there are several levels of comfort and cost. Bunks on or below deck on 3rd class should be fine, as long as the ship isn't overcrowded.

Ferry prices vary widely but, as a guide, the fare for the 22-hour voyage between Manila and Cebu City costs P1768 to P6414 on WG&A/Superferry, depending on which class you choose to travel. Before purchasing your ticket, it pays to ask about discounts. Ferries, like airlines, offer promotional discounts. Also inquire about student discounts: some shipping lines knock 15% to 30% off if you can show a valid student ID.

The following are the main ferry companies in the Philippines:

Negros Navigation (☎ 02-245 5588 in Manila; www.negrosnavigation.ph)

Sulpicio Lines (☎ 02-245 0616 in Manila; www.sulpiciolines.com)

WG&A/Superferry (☎ 02-528 7000 in Manila; www.superferry.com.ph)

Small Craft

Ferries may carry more weight, but bangka (also known as pumpboats) are the backbone of inter-island travel. These are small wooden boats with two wooden or bamboo outriggers. In some areas, in addition to

single rides, *bangka* can be hired for day trips at a reasonable cost. The cost of the boat trip can be shared between the number of passengers aboard.

Bangka are powered by recycled automotive engines, so they can be noisy – we recommend bringing earplugs if you're sensitive to noise and plan a lot of *bangka* travel. They are often on regular schedules, but won't hit the surf if seas are rough; *bangka* pilots aren't always crazy about night trips either.

Be wary of crossing fast-flowing rivers, especially when they're swollen by floods. Jury-rigged and overloaded 'ferries' – often just several *bangka* tied beneath a wooden platform – are particularly prone to capsizing.

BUS

An enormous number of bus services cover the Philippines and generally do it quite cheaply and reliably. Island-hopping on a bus is even an option; in fact, you can travel all the way from the northernmost tip of Luzon to the southernmost corner of Mindanao without getting your feet wet.

Departures are usually quite frequent, but take care if there's only one bus a day – drivers sometimes decide to leave earlier than scheduled if the bus is full! Many Filipinos like to travel early in the morning or after nightfall, when it's cool, so there are often more buses at this time.

As in most countries, it pays to mind your baggage while buses load and unload.

Costs

You can roughly calculate the fare and the time a bus journey will take based on distance. Regular buses generally cover a bit under 2km per peso and the average speed is about 50km per hour. *Voilà!* A 100km journey costs P50 or so and takes two hours.

On the other hand, you'd need a slide rule and a crystal ball to factor in chickens crossing the road, the number of flat tyres, heart-stopping spurts of speed and so on, all of which seem to have been magically factored into the actual price you pay. It's a bit easier to take a look at the prices written on chalkboards wherever the buses depart.

Air-con buses are around 15% to 20% more expensive than ordinary buses, and trips on gravel roads are normally pricier than travel on sealed roads.

Reservations

As noted earlier, drivers get an itchy pedal foot when the bus is full, and clutching a reservation to your chest as the bus zooms away without you is cold comfort. That said, reservations are useful, especially on popular routes and early-morning buses where competition for a seat can be pretty stiff.

In bigger towns, reservations can be made with the bus company by phone or in person; in smaller centres, often a particular shop takes reservations for buses belonging to one or more companies. On some routes you can also ring to request that a bus stop for you at a designated time and place.

CAR & MOTORCYCLE

If time is short, driving yourself is a quicker option than relying on jeepneys and other public transport, but it does come with caveats. Philippine driving is possibly at its most manic in and around Manila, and in Luzon's central mountains. It's less life-threatening elsewhere, though, and verges on pleasant in and around cities such as Cebu.

Whatever you do, don't try to emulate the local style – driving in the Philippines is one area of cultural difference where the 'when in Rome' principle doesn't apply.

Driving Licence

Your home country's driving licence is legally valid for 90 days in the Philippines. Technically, you are supposed to have an International Driving Permit for any period longer than this, and some car-rental companies may require you to have this permit when hiring vehicles from them.

Hire CAR

Rentals are generally offered on a daily or weekly basis, with or without the added expense of a driver, and terms and conditions can vary widely from one car-hire company to another.

To give you an idea how the system works locally, here's how Budget does it: you must be between 25 and 60 years of age and hold an International Driving Permit. You will also be required to present a valid passport and a valid credit card such as American Express or Visa. You don't have to pay in advance (a requirement with other car-hire companies), but a photocopy of your pass-

port and credit card will be made for the company's records. Payment is made when you return the vehicle, at which point you may elect to pay in cash (your credit-card imprint will then be destroyed). Both pesos and US dollars are accepted.

The big international car-hire companies all have offices in Manila and at NAIA; see p114 for details.

In the Visayas, local car-hire companies in Cebu and Iloilo generally charge around P1500 per 12 hours, with special deals for longer periods.

MOTORCYCLE

You can rent motorcycles and motor scooters in many tourist spots; they shouldn't be too hard to find. For example, resort-happy Alona Beach on Panglao Island is lined with motorcycles for hire from P600 per day. In towns, popular guesthouses and cafés sometimes have motorcycle-rental shops nearby. In more remote areas, just ask around – even if there's no rental shop, you might find somebody willing to rent out their motorcycle for a fee.

As a rule, 125cc Honda or Suzuki cycles cost P500 to P700 per day; smaller cycles are around P350. Finding a helmet can be difficult.

Insurance

Philippine law requires that you have third-party auto insurance with a Philippines auto-insurance company when you drive in the Philippines. If you rent a car, this can be arranged with the rental agency. You are required to carry a minimum of P750,000 of insurance. Auto insurance is available from local insurance agencies.

Road Rules

Driving is on the right-hand side of the road (or at least it's supposed to be). If you do decide to hire a car or motorcycle, defensive driving is definitely the order of the day. Jeepneys and buses will stop at random to drop off and pick up passengers, and you should give way to buses in almost all situations.

In general, the outside lane is the safest place to be, though you can expect people to overtake on both sides if there's a gap in the traffic. On the expressways out of Manila, the hard shoulder is often used as an

overtaking lane, so drivers should take extra care when exiting the highway.

Night driving holds its own particular hazards, quite apart from the issue of potential robberies in political trouble-spots (eg certain parts of Mindanao). It's best to avoid driving at night if you can, but if you find yourself on the road after dark it pays to know that tricycles, motorcycles and even large trucks are often without lights. In small towns you should look out for school zones, which are frequently reduced to one lane, and for people who have put out tables and chairs on the street for an impromptu drinking and/or eating session.

Also beware of pedestrians suddenly emerging from the dark and darting across the road, or old cans fashioned into crude kerosene lamps, which are sometimes used to mark broken-down vehicles, accidents and roadworks.

With the exception of the expressways out of Manila, most roads in the Philippines are single lane, which can lead to some wild overtaking by local drivers.

HITCHING

Hitching is never entirely safe in any country in the world, and we don't recommend it. Travellers who decide to hitch should understand that they are taking a small but potentially serious risk. People who do choose to hitch will be safer if they travel in pairs and let someone know where they are planning to go. And, needless to say, hitching in the guerrilla territory of Mindanao is positively suicidal.

The cost of transport in the Philippines is generally so low that hitchhiking isn't worth the trouble; you're seldom left stranded without a cheap and willing jeepney in sight. A hitchhiker is such an unusual sight in the Philippines that most regular drivers will probably ignore you if you stand on the roadside with your thumb out; the only ones who might stop are truck or jeepney drivers, who would expect a few pesos if they gave you a lift.

LOCAL TRANSPORT

Jeepney

A jeepney is what you'd get if you crossed a jeep with a bus. Jeepneys are the main mode of public transportation in most towns, and are used for both local and long-distance

transport in the Philippines. They can be flagged down anywhere, but usually prefer to stop where there is a crowd of potential customers. The Filipino phrase *bayad ko* (buy-yad-ko) translates as 'here is my fare' and will get the driver's attention.

Jeepneys are plentiful on most routes, but you may have to wait a while to get your ride: jeepney drivers are not inclined to depart until they've got (at least) a full load. During the rush hours or in the aftermath of a sudden downpour, be prepared to be packed in like sardines, with three or four hardy souls clinging to the back or the roof of the vehicle for dear life.

Jeepneys follow a set route (though this can suddenly change due to traffic conditions) and stop on demand, but it can be hard to see where you are from inside the vehicle – the best seats are up the front next to the driver. In big cities like Manila, jeepneys are festooned with signboards indicating where the vehicle goes; in other places, there's one sign in the front. Occasionally jeepneys are unmarked and you'll have to ask the driver where it's going.

Paying for a jeepney ride is straightforward – there's a price (ask other passengers if you're unsure) and you pay it, usually under the watchful eye of fellow travellers, who will help with translations if need be.

The average price for a short trip in Manila is P7 and you can pay anywhere along the way. The driver usually has change, at least for smaller bills. If you are too far from the driver, simply hand your money to a passenger near the driver – not only will they pass on your money to the driver but will hand you back your change as well.

When you want to get off, you can rap on the roof, hiss (you'll be joined by a chorus of 'Pss!' from the other passengers) or use the correct term, *pára* (*pa-ra*), which is Filipino for 'stop'.

If you don't mind the expense, you can hire a jeepney (plus the jeepney driver, of course) and have it all to yourself for around P1500 to P2000 a day (sometimes less outside Manila).

When taking long-distance jeepney rides, these are some things to keep in mind:

- Find out what the fare should be before you hop in. You can ask other passengers or passersby, or, if that fails, try a nearby shop.

- Try not to be the first person to get into an empty jeepney. If the driver suddenly takes off, you may have just hired a vehicle on a pricey 'special ride' (which is probably the case if the driver doesn't stop for anyone else). If this happens, ask the driver to stop, and explain that you're only looking for a regular ride.
- Take care if several men suddenly get in and try to sit near you. Chances are you're being set up to be pickpocketed – get off and find another vehicle.
- On long trips it's worth trying to get a seat next to the driver – there's more leg room in the front and the time passes more quickly if you can see where you're going.

Light Rail

Some parts of Manila are served by an elevated railway system; for details see p115.

Taxi

Manila is reputed to have Southeast Asia's cheapest taxi fares. However, some Manila taxi drivers may refuse to use their meters so this is something of a moot point. Officially, flagfall is P30, after which the rate is P2.50 for every 300m or every two minutes of waiting time.

Thousands of taxis ply the streets of Manila, but when you're desperately in need of their services there's suddenly not a single one available. The few that will stop are wont to 'interview' you regarding your destination and will drive off if they're not satisfied with your answers. Even locals are subjected to this irritating practice, a fact that might provide some paranoid travellers with a little comfort.

Thanks to a government drive to punish rude and dishonest drivers, many taxis now use meters. Some will still try to strike up a deal with you (foreigners are often subjected to this), but most will comply if you insist on the use of the meter (this may, of course, put you on the most roundabout course to your destination). On the other hand, you might want to privately hire a taxi, in which case the normal practice is to hire it by the hour (P250) or the day (P1500 to P2000). As with everything else in the Philippines, the arrangement will depend on what (and how well) you negotiate with the driver.

Though it's become less common recently, there have been cases of taxi passengers being robbed at gun or knife point, sometimes with the driver in cahoots with the culprits or the driver himself holding up the passengers. Nowadays, the drivers seem to be the preferred prey of the criminals, perhaps because they're more likely to be carrying cash than the passengers!

The chances of getting robbed in a taxi are pretty slim during daylight hours, although it's wise to stay alert when travelling in deserted areas. Keep your pack or bag beside you or on your lap at all times and get out straight away (in a secure populated area, of course, not in the middle of nowhere or in a slum area) if you suspect you're being taken for a ride in more ways than one.

Tricycle

The tricycle is basically the Philippine rickshaw: a little, roofed sidecar bolted to a motorbike or, less often, a bicycle. Tricycles are found in their various forms nearly everywhere and are useful – essential even – for short trips. In many areas, they can also be rented by the hour for around P100.

The flat fare around town is usually P5 per passenger; for longer trips around town, you will be charged at least double this figure. Note that this is the rate that locals pay. In some towns you can get away with paying the local rate; in many tourist areas, however, your chances of getting such a rate range from slim to nonexistent. In these areas, drivers of motorised tricycles will routinely quote P150 – especially if night is fast approaching and/or the trip involves unsealed roads. Locals would pay a fraction of this price, so feel free to haggle.

Tricycles are often garishly done up in the mode of a jeepney, and you'll likely hear one before you see one from the noise of the smoke-belching two-stroke engine.

Tricycles in Manila (where they're also called pedicabs or sidecars) are normally confined to certain routes, usually around commercial centres or residential villages or subdivisions, and will seldom venture away from their regular beat.

Van

Vans (minibuses) have become popular in many parts of the Philippines as rivals to jeepneys and regular buses. Operated pri-

vately, these vehicles usually hang around bus depots or busy shopping centres and take passengers (in air-conditioned comfort) to set destinations. The cost of a ride in a van is two or three times more than for a jeepney (the basic fare in Manila is P10 per passenger), but the extra comfort is certainly worth the additional cost. Unlike jeepneys and buses, which are often decrepit, without air-conditioning and therefore exposed to exhaust fumes and noise, these vans are generally newer vehicles and are always air-conditioned, sometimes to freezing point. The drawback is that drivers hate to head off with half-empty vehicles, so you may have to wait a while or pay extra to leave straight away. Conversely, this mode of public transport has become so popular that it may be hard to get a seat (a van accommodates nine passengers plus driver and no 'hangers-on' are allowed).

Many vans, particularly those operating in Manila, are locally assembled Toyota models, referred to as 'FX'. The fare is usually around P25 for long rides and P15 for shorter hops. They can also be hired like taxis, sometimes at prearranged flat rates, sometimes for rates that must be agreed upon by negotiating with the driver.

TOURS

There are a variety of tours of the Philippines available. The following is just a sample of what's available.

EcoFirst Adventures (www.ecofirstadventures.com)

This USA-based company offers a variety of adventure-sports trips in Palawan.

Philippine-Travel.com (www.philippine-travel.co.uk)

This UK-based operator offers a variety of tours including diving and live-aboards.

Philippines Private Tours (www.philippinesprivate.com)

Operated by Lonely Planet author Chris Rowthorn, this company specialises in private tours of Palawan and Manila. It also offers airport pickups in Manila and online consulting about Philippines travel.

For reliable local agencies offering a variety of tours, see p75.

TRAIN

The route south from Manila to the Bicol region in southeast Luzon is the only railway line in the country. Although it's old and none too speedy, it's a viable option for travel down to Naga and Legaspi and points along the way (see p189 for details).

Health

Dr Trish Batchelor

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Health issues and the quality of medical facilities vary enormously depending on where and how you travel in the Philippines. Many of the major cities are now very well developed, while travel to rural areas can expose you to a variety of health risks and inadequate medical care.

Travellers tend to worry about contracting infectious diseases when in the tropics, but infections are a rare cause of serious illness or death in travellers. Pre-existing medical conditions such as heart disease, and accidental injury (especially traffic accidents), account for most life-threatening problems.

Becoming ill in some way, however, is relatively common. Fortunately most common illnesses can either be prevented with some commonsense behaviour or be treated easily with a well-stocked traveller's medical kit.

The following advice is a general guide only and does not replace the advice of a doctor trained in travel medicine.

BEFORE YOU GO

Pack medications in their original, clearly labelled containers. A signed and dated letter from your physician describing your medical conditions and medications, including

generic names, is also a good idea. If carrying syringes or needles, be sure to have a physician's letter stating their medical necessity. If you have a heart condition bring a copy of your ECG taken just prior to travelling.

If you happen to take any regular medication bring double your needs in case of loss or theft. In most Southeast Asian countries, excluding Singapore, you can buy many medications over the counter without a doctor's prescription, but it can be difficult to find some of the newer drugs, particularly the latest antidepressant drugs, contraceptive pills and blood-pressure medications.

INSURANCE

Even if you are fit and healthy, don't travel without health insurance – accidents do happen. Declare any existing medical conditions you have – the insurance company will check if your problem is pre-existing and will not cover you if it is undeclared. You may require extra cover for adventure activities such as rock climbing. If your health insurance doesn't cover you for medical expenses abroad, consider getting extra insurance. If you're uninsured, emergency evacuation is expensive – bills of over US\$100,000 are not uncommon.

Find out in advance if your insurance plan will make payments directly to providers or reimburse you later for overseas health expenditures. (In many countries doctors expect payment to be made in cash.) Some policies offer lower and higher medical-expense options; the higher ones are chiefly for countries that have extremely high medical costs, such as the USA. You may prefer a policy that pays doctors or hospitals directly rather than you having to pay on the spot and claim later. If you have to claim later, make sure you keep all documentation. Some policies ask you to call back (reverse charges) to a centre in your home country where an immediate assessment of your problem is made.

VACCINATIONS

Specialised travel-medicine clinics are your best source of information; they stock all available vaccines and will be able to give

specific recommendations for you and your trip. The doctors will take into account factors such as past vaccination history, the length of your trip, activities you may be undertaking and underlying medical conditions, such as pregnancy.

Most vaccines don't produce immunity until at least two weeks after they're given, so visit a doctor four to eight weeks before departure. Ask your doctor for an International Certificate of Vaccination (otherwise known as the yellow booklet), which will list all the vaccinations you've received.

Recommended Vaccinations

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends the following vaccinations for travellers to Southeast Asia:

Adult diphtheria and tetanus Single booster recommended if none in the previous 10 years. Side effects include a sore arm and fever.

Hepatitis A Provides almost 100% protection for up to a year; a booster after 12 months provides at least another 20 years' protection. Mild side effects such as headache and a sore arm occur in 5% to 10% of people.

Hepatitis B Now considered routine for most travellers. Given as three shots over six months. A rapid schedule is also available, as is a combined vaccination with Hepatitis A. Side effects are mild and uncommon, usually headache and a sore arm. Lifetime protection occurs in 95% of people.

Measles, mumps and rubella Two doses of MMR required unless you have had the diseases. Occasionally a rash and flu-like illness can develop a week after receiving the vaccine. Many young adults require a booster.

Polio In 2002, no countries in Southeast Asia reported cases of polio. Only one booster is required as an adult for lifetime protection. Inactivated polio vaccine is safe during pregnancy.

Typhoid Recommended unless your trip is less than a week and only to developed cities. The vaccine offers around 70% protection, lasts for two to three years and comes as a single shot. Tablets are also available, however the injection is usually recommended as it has fewer side effects. A sore arm and fever may occur.

Varicella If you haven't had chickenpox, discuss this vaccination with your doctor.

These immunisations are recommended for long-term travellers (more than one month) or those at special risk:

Japanese B Encephalitis Three injections in all. Booster recommended after two years. A sore arm and headache are the most common side effects. Rarely, an allergic reaction comprising hives and swelling can occur up to 10 days after any of the three doses.

Meningitis Single injection. There are two types of vaccination: the quadrivalent vaccine gives two to three years protection; meningitis group C vaccine gives around 10 years protection. Recommended for long-term travellers aged under 25.

Rabies Three injections in all. A booster after one year will then provide 10 years protection. Side effects are rare – occasionally a headache and sore arm.

Tuberculosis A complex issue. Adult long-term travellers are usually recommended to have a TB skin test before and after travel, rather than vaccination. Only one vaccine is given in a lifetime.

Required Vaccinations

The only vaccine required by international regulations is yellow fever. Proof of vaccination will only be required if you have visited a country in the yellow-fever zone within the six days prior to entering Southeast Asia. If you are travelling to Southeast Asia from Africa or South America you should check to see if you require proof of vaccination.

MEDICAL CHECKLIST

Recommended items for a personal medical kit:

- antifungal cream, eg Clotrimazole
- antibacterial cream, eg Muciprocin
- antibiotics for skin infections, eg Amoxicillin/Clavulanate or Cephalexin
- antibiotics for diarrhoea eg Norfloxacin or Ciprofloxacin; Azithromycin for bacterial diarrhoea; Tinidazole for giardiasis or amoebic dysentery
- antihistamine for allergies, eg Cetirizine for daytime and Promethazine for night
- anti-inflammatories, eg Ibuprofen
- antiseptic, eg Betadine
- antispasmodic for stomach cramps, eg Buscopan
- contraceptives
- decongestant, eg Pseudoephedrine
- DEET-based insect repellent
- diarrhoea – consider an oral rehydration solution, eg Gastrolyte, diarrhoea 'stopper', eg Loperamide, and anti-nausea medication, eg Prochlorperazine
- first-aid items such as scissors, safety pins, Elastoplasts, bandages, gauze, thermometer (electronic, not mercury), sterile needles and syringes and tweezers
- indigestion medication, eg Quick Eze or Mylanta
- iodine tablets (unless you are pregnant or have a thyroid problem) to purify water

- laxative, eg Coloxyl
- migraine medication (your personal brand), if a migraine sufferer
- paracetamol for pain
- Permethrin (to impregnate clothing and mosquito nets) for repelling insects
- steroid cream for allergic/itchy rashes, eg 1% to 2% hydrocortisone
- sunscreen and hat
- throat lozenges
- thrush (vaginal yeast infection) treatment, eg Clotrimazole pessaries or Diflucan tablet
- Ural or equivalent if you're prone to urine infections

INTERNET RESOURCES

There is a wealth of travel health advice on the Internet. For further information, **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com) is a good place to start. The **World Health Organization** (WHO; www.who.int/ith) publishes a superb book called *International Travel & Health*, which is revised annually and is available free online. Another website of general interest is **MD Travel Health** (www.mdtravelhealth.com), which provides complete travel health recommendations for every country and is updated daily. The **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention** (CDC; www.cdc.gov) website also has good general information.

FURTHER READING

Lonely Planet's *Healthy Travel – Asia & India* is a handy pocket-size book that is packed with useful information including pre-trip planning, emergency first aid, immunisation and disease information and what to do if you get sick on the road. Other recommended references include *Traveller's Health* by Dr Richard Dawood and *Travelling Well* by Dr Deborah Mills – check out the website www.travellingwell.com.au.

IN TRANSIT

DEEP VEIN THROMBOSIS (DVT)

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) occurs when blood clots form in the legs during plane flights, chiefly because of prolonged immobility. The longer the flight, the greater the risk. Though most blood clots are reabsorbed uneventfully, some may break off and travel through the blood vessels to the

lungs, where they may cause life-threatening complications.

The chief symptom of DVT is swelling or pain of the foot, ankle or calf, usually but not always on just one side. If a blood clot travels to the lungs it may cause chest pain and difficulty in breathing. Travellers with any of these symptoms should immediately seek medical attention.

To prevent the development of DVT on long flights you should walk about the cabin, perform isometric compressions of the leg muscles (ie contract the leg muscles while sitting), drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol.

JET LAG & MOTION SICKNESS

Jet lag is common when crossing more than five time zones; it results in insomnia, fatigue, malaise or nausea. To avoid jet lag try drinking plenty of fluids (nonalcoholic) and eating light meals. Upon arrival, seek exposure to natural sunlight and readjust your schedule (for meals, sleep etc) as soon as possible.

Antihistamines such as dimenhydrinate (Dramamine) and meclizine (Antivert, Bonine) are usually the first choice for treating motion sickness. Their main side effect is drowsiness. A herbal alternative is ginger, which works like a charm for some people.

IN THE PHILIPPINES

AVAILABILITY OF HEALTHCARE

Most capital cities in Southeast Asia now have clinics catering specifically to travellers and expats. These clinics are usually more expensive than local medical facilities, but are worth utilising, as they will offer a superior standard of care. Additionally they understand the local system, and are aware of the safest local hospitals and best specialists. They can also liaise with insurance companies should you require evacuation. Good medical care is available in most major cities in the Philippines. Recommended clinics are listed under 'Information' in the city sections of regional chapters in this book.

It is difficult to find reliable medical care in rural areas. Your embassy and insurance company are also good contacts.

Self-treatment may be appropriate if your problem is minor (eg traveller's diarrhoea), you are carrying the appropriate medication and you cannot attend a recommended clinic. If you think you may have a serious disease, especially malaria, do not waste time – travel to the nearest quality facility to receive attention. It is always better to be assessed by a doctor than to rely on self-treatment.

Buying medication over the counter is not recommended, as fake medications and poorly stored or out-of-date drugs are common.

INFECTIOUS ILLNESSES

Chikungunya fever

This less common infection poses only a small risk to travellers in the Philippines, and so is mentioned only in passing. Transmitted by mosquitoes, this viral infection occurs in the Visayas. Sudden pain in one or more joints, fever, headache, nausea and rash are the main symptoms. It is rarely fatal, though stiffness in the joints can last for weeks or months. Seek medical advice if you think you may have contracted it.

Cutaneous Larva Migrans

This disease is caused by dog hookworm; the rash starts as a small lump, then slowly spreads in a linear fashion. It is intensely itchy, especially at night. It is easily treated with medications and should not be cut out or frozen.

Dengue Fever

This mosquito-borne disease is becoming increasingly problematic throughout Southeast Asia, especially in the cities. As there is no vaccine available it can only be prevented by avoiding mosquito bites. The mosquito that carries dengue bites day and night, so use insect avoidance measures at all times. Symptoms include high fever, severe headache and body ache (dengue was previously known as 'breakbone fever'). Some people develop a rash and experience diarrhoea. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol – do not take aspirin as it increases the likelihood of haemorrhaging. See a doctor to be diagnosed and monitored.

Filariasis

This is a mosquito-borne disease that is very common in the local population, yet

very rare in travellers. Mosquito-avoidance measures are the best way to prevent this disease.

Hepatitis A

A problem found throughout the region, this food- and water-borne virus infects the liver, causing jaundice (yellow skin and eyes), nausea and lethargy. There is no specific treatment for hepatitis A; you just need to allow time for the liver to heal. All travellers to Southeast Asia should be vaccinated against hepatitis A.

Hepatitis B

The only sexually transmitted disease that can be prevented by vaccination, hepatitis B is spread by body fluids, including sexual contact. In some parts of Southeast Asia up to 20% of the population are carriers of hepatitis B, and usually are unaware of this. The long-term consequences can include liver cancer and cirrhosis.

Hepatitis E

Hepatitis E is transmitted through contaminated food and water and has similar symptoms to hepatitis A, but is far less common. It is a severe problem in pregnant women and can result in the death of both mother and baby. There is currently no vaccine, and prevention is by following safe eating and drinking guidelines.

HIV

HIV is not the pandemic in the Philippines that it is in other parts of Asia, with an infection rate of less than 0.1% of the Filipino population. Heterosexual sex is the main method of transmission.

Influenza

Influenza (flu) is present year-round in the tropics; symptoms include high fever, muscle aches, runny nose, cough and sore throat. It can be very severe in people over the age of 65 or in those with underlying medical conditions such as heart disease or diabetes; vaccination is recommended for these individuals. There is no specific treatment, just rest and paracetamol.

Japanese B Encephalitis

While a rare disease in travellers, at least 50,000 locals are infected each year in

Southeast Asia. This viral disease is transmitted by mosquitoes. Most cases occur in rural areas and vaccination is recommended for travellers spending more than one month outside of cities. There is no treatment, and a third of infected people will die while another third will suffer permanent brain damage.

Malaria

For such a serious and potentially deadly disease, there is an enormous amount of misinformation concerning malaria. You must get expert advice as to whether your trip actually puts you at risk. Many parts of Southeast Asia, particularly city and resort areas, have minimal to no risk of malaria, and the risk of side effects from the tablets may outweigh the risk of getting the disease. For most rural areas, however, the risk of contracting the disease far outweighs the risk of any tablet side effects. Remember that malaria can be fatal. Before you travel, seek medical advice on the right medication and dosage for you.

Malaria is caused by a parasite transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. The most important symptom of malaria is fever, but general symptoms such as headache, diarrhoea, cough or chills may also occur. Diagnosis can only be made by taking a blood sample.

Two strategies should be combined to prevent malaria – mosquito avoidance and antimalarial medications. Most people who catch malaria are taking inadequate or no antimalarial medication.

Travellers are advised to prevent mosquito bites by taking these steps:

- Use a DEET-containing insect repellent on exposed skin. Wash this off at night, as long as you are sleeping under a mosquito net. Natural repellents such as Citronella can be effective, but must be applied more frequently than products containing DEET.
- Sleep under a mosquito net impregnated with Permethrin.
- Choose accommodation with screens and fans (if not air-conditioned).
- Impregnate clothing with Permethrin in high-risk areas.
- Wear long sleeves and trousers in light colours.
- Use mosquito coils.

- Spray your room with insect repellent before going out for your evening meal.

Measles

Measles remains a problem in some parts of Southeast Asia. This highly contagious bacterial infection is spread via coughing and sneezing. Most people born before 1966 are immune as they had the disease in childhood. Measles starts with a high fever and rash and can be complicated by pneumonia and brain disease. There is no specific treatment.

Rabies

This uniformly fatal disease is spread by the bite or lick of an infected animal – most commonly a dog or monkey. You should seek medical advice immediately after any animal bite and commence post-exposure treatment. Having pre-travel vaccination means the post-bite treatment is greatly simplified. If an animal bites you, gently wash the wound with soap and water, and apply iodine based antiseptic. If you are not pre-vaccinated you will need to receive rabies immunoglobulin as soon as possible.

Schistosomiasis

Schistosomiasis is a tiny parasite that enters your skin after you've been swimming in contaminated water – travellers usually only get a light infection and hence have no symptoms. If you are concerned, you can be tested three months after exposure. On rare occasions, travellers may develop 'Katayama fever'. This occurs some weeks after exposure, as the parasite passes through the lungs and causes an allergic reaction – symptoms are coughing and fever. Schistosomiasis is easily treated with medications.

STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases include warts, herpes, syphilis, gonorrhoea and chlamydia. People carrying these diseases often have no signs of infection. Condoms will prevent gonorrhoea and chlamydia but not warts or herpes. If after a sexual encounter you develop any rash, lumps, discharge or pain when passing urine seek immediate medical attention. If you have been sexually active during your travels have an STD check on your return home.

Tuberculosis

Tuberculosis (TB) is rare in short-term travellers. Medical and aid workers, and long-term travellers who have significant contact with the local population, should take precautions. Vaccination is usually only given to children under the age of five, but adults at risk are recommended pre- and post-travel TB testing. The main symptoms are fever, cough, weight loss, night sweats and tiredness.

Typhoid

This serious bacterial infection is spread via food and water. It gives a high and slowly progressive fever and headache, and may be accompanied by a dry cough and stomach pain. It is diagnosed by blood tests and treated with antibiotics. Vaccination is recommended for all travellers spending more than a week in Southeast Asia, or travelling outside of the major cities. Be aware that vaccination is not 100% effective, so you must still be careful with what you eat and drink.

Typhus

Murine typhus is spread by the bite of a flea whereas scrub typhus is spread via a mite. These diseases are rare in travellers. Symptoms include fever, muscle pains and a rash. You can avoid these diseases by following general insect-avoidance measures. Doxycycline will also prevent them.

TRAVELLER'S DIARRHOEA

Traveller's diarrhoea is by far the most common problem affecting travellers – between 30% and 50% of people will suffer from it within two weeks of starting their trip. In over 80% of cases, traveller's diarrhoea is caused by a bacteria (there are numerous potential culprits), and therefore responds promptly to treatment with antibiotics. Treatment with antibiotics will depend on your situation – how sick you are, how quickly you need to get better, where you are etc.

Traveller's diarrhoea is defined as the passage of more than three watery bowel actions within 24 hours, plus at least one other symptom such as fever, cramps, nausea, vomiting or feeling generally unwell.

Treatment consists of staying well hydrated; rehydration solutions like Gastrolyte are the best for this. Antibiotics such

as Norfloxacin, Ciprofloxacin or Azithromycin will kill the bacteria quickly.

Loperamide is just a 'stopper' and doesn't get to the cause of the problem. It can be helpful, for example if you have to go on a long bus ride. Don't take Loperamide if you have a fever, or blood in your stools. Seek medical attention quickly if you do not respond to an appropriate antibiotic.

Amoebic Dysentery

Amoebic dysentery is very rare in travellers but is often misdiagnosed by poor-quality labs in Southeast Asia. Symptoms are similar to bacterial diarrhoea, ie fever, bloody diarrhoea and generally feeling unwell. You should always seek reliable medical care if you have blood in your diarrhoea. Treatment involves two drugs; Tinidazole or Metronidazole to kill the parasite in your gut and then a second drug to kill the cysts. If left untreated complications such as liver or gut abscesses can occur.

Giardiasis

Giardia lamblia is a parasite that is relatively common in travellers. Symptoms include nausea, bloating, excess gas, fatigue and intermittent diarrhoea. 'Eggy' burps are often attributed solely to giardiasis, but work in Nepal has shown that they are not specific to this infection. The parasite will eventually go away if left untreated but this can take months. The treatment of choice is Tinidazole, with Metronidazole being a second-line option.

ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS

Air Pollution

Air pollution, particularly vehicle pollution, is an increasing problem in most of Southeast Asia's major cities. If you have severe respiratory problems speak with your doctor before travelling to any heavily polluted urban centres. This pollution also causes minor respiratory problems such as sinusitis, dry throat and irritated eyes. If troubled by the pollution leave the city for a few days and get some fresh air.

Diving

Divers and surfers should seek specialised advice before they travel to ensure their medical kit contains treatment for coral cuts and tropical ear infections, as well as the

standard problems. Divers should ensure their insurance covers them for decompression illness – get specialised dive insurance through an organisation such as Divers Alert Network (DAN; www.danseap.org). Have a dive medical before you leave your home country – there are certain medical conditions that are incompatible with diving, and economic considerations may override health considerations for some dive operators.

Food

Eating in restaurants is the biggest risk factor for contracting traveller's diarrhoea. Ways to avoid it include eating only freshly cooked food, and avoiding shellfish and food that has been sitting around in buffets. Peel all fruit, cook vegetables, and soak salads in iodine water for at least 20 minutes. Eat in busy restaurants with a high turnover of customers.

Heat

For most people it takes at least two weeks to adapt to the hot climate. Swelling of the feet and ankles is common, as are muscle cramps caused by excessive sweating. Prevent these by avoiding dehydration and excessive activity in the heat. Take it easy when you first arrive. Don't eat salt tablets (they aggravate the gut), although drinking rehydration solution or eating salty food helps. Treat cramps by stopping activity, resting, rehydrating with double-strength rehydration solution and gently stretching.

Dehydration is the main contributor to heat exhaustion. Symptoms include feeling weak, headache, irritability, nausea or vomiting, sweaty skin, a fast, weak pulse and a normal or slightly elevated body temperature. Treatment involves getting out of the heat and/or sun, fanning the victim and applying cool wet cloths to the skin, laying the victim flat with their legs raised and rehydrating with water containing a quarter of a teaspoon of salt per litre. Recovery is usually rapid, though it is common to feel weak for some days afterwards.

Heatstroke is a serious medical emergency. Symptoms come on suddenly and include weakness, nausea, a hot dry body with a body temperature of over 41°C, dizziness, confusion, loss of coordination, fits and eventually collapse and loss of consciousness. Seek medical help and com-

mence cooling by getting the person out of the heat, removing their clothes, fanning them and applying cool wet cloths or ice to their body, especially to the groin and armpits.

Prickly heat is a common skin rash in the tropics, caused by sweat being trapped under the skin. The result is an itchy rash of tiny lumps. Treat by moving out of the heat and into an air-conditioned area for a few hours and by having cool showers. Creams and ointments clog the skin so they should be avoided. Locally bought prickly-heat powder can be helpful.

Tropical fatigue is common in long-term expats based in the tropics. It's rarely due to disease and is caused by the climate, inadequate mental rest, excessive alcohol intake and the demands of daily work in a different culture.

Insect Bites & Stings

Bedbugs don't carry disease but their bites are very itchy. They live in the cracks of furniture and walls and then migrate to the bed at night to feed on you. You can treat the itch with an antihistamine. Lice inhabit various parts of your body but most commonly your head and pubic area. Transmission is via close contact with an infected person. They can be difficult to treat and you may need numerous applications of an antilice shampoo such as Permethrin. Pubic lice are usually contracted from sexual contact.

Ticks are contracted after walking in rural areas. Ticks are commonly found behind the ears, on the belly and in armpits. If you have had a tick bite and experience symptoms such as a rash at the site of the bite or elsewhere, fever or muscle aches you should see a doctor. Doxycycline prevents tick-borne diseases.

Leeches are found in humid rainforest areas. They do not transmit any disease but their bites are often intensely itchy for weeks afterwards and can easily become infected. Apply an iodine-based antiseptic to any leech bite to help prevent infection.

Bee and wasp stings mainly cause problems for people who are allergic to them. Anyone with a serious bee or wasp allergy should carry an injection of adrenaline (eg an EpiPen) for emergency treatment. For others pain is the main problem – apply ice to the sting and take painkillers.

Most jellyfish in Southeast Asian waters are not dangerous, just irritating. First aid for jellyfish stings involves pouring vinegar onto the affected area to neutralise the poison. Do not rub sand or water onto the stings. Take painkillers, and anyone who feels ill in any way after being stung should seek medical advice. Take local advice if there are dangerous jellyfish around and keep out of the water.

Parasites

Numerous parasites are common in local populations in Southeast Asia; however, most of these are rare in travellers. The two rules to follow if you wish to avoid parasitic infections are to wear shoes and to avoid eating raw food, especially fish, pork and vegetables. A number of parasites are transmitted via the skin by walking barefoot, including strongyloides, hookworm and cutaneous *larva migrans*.

Skin Problems

Fungal rashes are common in humid climates. There are two common fungal rashes that affect travellers. The first occurs in moist areas that get less air such as the groin, armpits and between the toes. It starts as a red patch that slowly spreads and is usually itchy. Treatment involves keeping the skin dry, avoiding chafing and using an antifungal cream such as Clotrimazole or Lamisil. *Tinea versicolor* is also common – this fungus causes small, light-coloured patches, most commonly on the back, chest and shoulders. Consult a doctor.

Cuts and scratches become easily infected in humid climates. Take meticulous care of any cuts and scratches to prevent complications such as abscesses. Immediately wash all wounds in clean water and apply antiseptic. If you develop signs of infection (increasing pain and redness) see a doctor. Divers and surfers should be particularly careful with coral cuts as they become easily infected.

Snakes

Southeast Asia is home to many species of both poisonous and harmless snakes. Assume all snakes are poisonous and never try to catch one. Always wear boots and long pants if walking in an area that may have snakes. First aid in the event of a snakebite

involves pressure immobilisation via an elastic bandage firmly wrapped around the affected limb, starting at the bite site and working up towards the chest. The bandage should not be so tight that the circulation is cut off, and the fingers or toes should be kept free so the circulation can be checked. Immobilise the limb with a splint and carry the victim to medical attention. Do not use tourniquets or try to suck the venom out. Antivenom is available for most species.

Sunburn

Even on a cloudy day sunburn can occur rapidly. Always use a strong sunscreen (at least factor 30), making sure to reapply after a swim, and always wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses outdoors. Avoid lying in the sun during the hottest part of the day (10am to 2pm). If you become sunburnt stay out of the sun until you have recovered, apply cool compresses and take painkillers for the discomfort. One percent hydrocortisone cream applied twice daily is also helpful.

WOMEN'S HEALTH

Pregnant women should receive specialised advice before travelling. The ideal time to travel is in the second trimester (between 16 and 28 weeks), during which the risk of pregnancy-related problems is at its lowest and pregnant women generally feel at their best. During the first trimester there is a risk of miscarriage and in the third trimester complications such as premature labour and high blood pressure are possible. It's wise to travel with a companion.

Always carry a list of quality medical facilities available at your destination and ensure you continue your standard antenatal care at these facilities. Avoid rural travel in areas with poor transportation and medical facilities. Most of all, ensure travel insurance covers all pregnancy-related possibilities, including premature labour.

Malaria is a high-risk disease in pregnancy. WHO recommends that pregnant women do *not* travel to areas that have Chloroquine-resistant malaria. None of the more effective antimalarial drugs are completely safe in pregnancy.

Traveller's diarrhoea can quickly lead to dehydration and result in inadequate blood flow to the placenta. Many of the drugs

used to treat various diarrhoea bugs are not recommended in pregnancy. Azithromycin is considered safe.

In the urban areas of Southeast Asia, supplies of sanitary products are readily available. Birth-control options may be limited so bring adequate supplies of your own form of contraception. Heat, humidity

and antibiotics can all contribute to thrush. Treatment is with antifungal creams and pessaries such as Clotrimazole. A practical alternative is a single tablet of Fluconazole (Diflucan). Urinary tract infections can be precipitated by dehydration or long bus journeys without toilet stops; bring suitable antibiotics.