

History

THE BEGINNING

Thanks to 'Tabon Man', who left a bit of his (or her, according to some) skull in a cave in Palawan at least 47,000 years ago, a sliver of light shines into the deep, dark prehistory of the Philippines. The oldest known human relic of the islands, this bone fragment suggests that the Tabon Caves helped early *Homo sapiens* survive the last ice age.

The ocean and the boat have always been powerful symbols in the Philippines. The word *barangay*, which refers to the basic Filipino social unit or a community, is derived from the ancient *balangay*, or sailboat.

The longest-held theory on the origins of Tabon Man is based on distinct waves of migration. Assuming that much of modern-day Asia was linked by land bridges, this theory posits that around 250,000 years ago our earliest human ancestors simply walked over to what is now the Philippines.

About 200,000 years later, in strode the nomadic Negrito groups from the Malay Peninsula, Borneo and perhaps even Australia. After an interval of roughly 2000 years, the Neolithic Age arrived in the form of the seafaring, tool-wielding Indonesians. The Indonesian groups brought with them formal farming and building skills.

It's fair to assume that this bunch was busily carving out the spectacular rice terraces of North Luzon (p173) some 2000 years ago. With the Iron Age came the Malays. Skilful sailors, potters and weavers, they built the first permanent settlements and prospered from around the 1st century AD until the 16th century, when the Spanish arrived. The wave migration theory holds that the Malays arrived in at least three ethnically diverse waves. The first wave provided the basis for the modern-day Bontoc and other tribes of North Luzon. The second laid the foundations for the most dominant of modern-day indigenous groups – the Bicolano, Bisayan and Tagalog. The third wave is thought to have established the fiercely proud Muslim Malays.

But written records are few, and wave migration is only one theory. An alternative proposed by some Philippine scholars suggests that the early inhabitants of Southeast Asia were of the same racial group (the Pithecanthropus group, to be exact), with more or less the same traditions and beliefs. Over time, they say, divisions formed according to the demands of the environment.

TRADE

The Chinese became the first foreigners to do business with the islands they called MaI as early as the 2nd century AD, although the first recorded Chinese expedition to the Philippines was in AD 982. Within a few decades, Chinese traders were regular visitors to towns along the coasts of Luzon, Mindoro and Sulu, and by around AD 1100 travellers from India, Borneo, Sumatra, Java, Siam (Thailand) and Japan were also including the islands on their trade runs. Gold was by then big business in Butuan (on the northern coast of Mindanao), Chinese settlements had

sprung up in Manila and on Jolo, and Japanese merchants were buying shop space in Manila and North Luzon.

For several centuries this peaceful trade arrangement thrived. Despite the island's well-known riches, the inhabitants were never directly threatened by their powerful Asian trading partners. The key, particularly in the case of China, was diplomacy. Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, the tribal leaders of the Philippines would make regular visits to Peking (Beijing) to honour the Chinese emperor.

THE SPANISH ERA

In the early 16th century, the Philippines began receiving visitors who would have far more long-lasting consequences. Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan landed at Samar at dawn on 16 March 1521. He claimed the islands for Spain and named them the *Islas del Poniente* (Western Islands). Soon after, the Portuguese arrived from the east and declared the islands to be the *Islas del Oriente* (Eastern Islands). Undaunted, Magellan set about giving the islanders a crash course in Catholicism and winning over various tribal chiefs before fatally taking things one step too far on Mactan Island (see p242).

Determined to press its claim, Spain sent four more expeditions; Ruy Lopez de Villalobos, commander of the fourth expedition, renamed the islands after the heir to the Spanish throne, Philip, Charles I's son. Philip, as King Philip II, sent a fresh fleet led by Miguel Lopez de Legazpi to the islands in the mid-16th century with strict orders to colonise and Catholicise. In 1565 an agreement was signed by Legazpi and Tupas, the defeated chief of Cebu, which made every Filipino answerable to Spanish law.

Legazpi, his soldiers and a band of Augustinian monks wasted no time in establishing a settlement where Cebu City now stands; Fort San Pedro (p232) is a surviving relic of the era. First called San Miguel, then Santísimo Nombre de Jesus, this fortified town hosted the earliest Filipino-Spanish Christian weddings and, critically, the baptisms of various Cebuano leaders. Panay Island's people were beaten into submission soon after, with Legazpi establishing a vital stronghold there (near present-day Roxas) in 1569.

The indigenous islanders – who by tradition were loath to work together anyway – were no match for the Spanish and their firearms. Spain's greatest challenge came from an old enemy – Islam. To Spain's horror (having recently booted out the Moors at home), the Muslims had a big head start: Islamic missionaries from Malacca had established towns in Mindoro and Luzon almost a century before the Spanish arrived. Legazpi finally succeeded in taking the strategic Muslim settlement of Maynilad (now Manila) in 1571, hastily proclaiming it the capital and building over the *kuta* (fort) of Rajah Sulayman. This was eventually to become Fort Santiago (p77).

So began a 300-year-long religious war that still smoulders in Mindanao, the spiritual home of Islam in the Philippines. The Spanish recruited newly Christianised Filipinos to help fight the Moros (as Muslim Filipinos were dubbed), many of whom earned a violent living as pirates. Meanwhile, Spain was courting the Chinese through trade. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, Spain's galleons – many of them built in

The Philippines has been the world's major supplier of pineapples since the 1980s, when most production was moved from Hawaii due to labour costs.

'After an interval of roughly 2000 years, the Neolithic Age arrived in the form of the seafaring, tool-wielding Indonesians'

TIMELINE 45,000 BC

'Tabon Man', the oldest discovered inhabitant of the 7000 islands, lives on Palawan

AD 982

First recorded Chinese expedition to the Philippines

1100

Traders from China, India, Japan and other countries throughout Asia are regularly trading with Philippine islands

1521

Ferdinand Magellan lands at Samar and claims the country for the Spanish

Cavite near Manila – also specialised in taking spices, silk, porcelain and gold to the New World, and returning with Mexican silver. Moro pirates dodged many a cannonball to claim a share of these riches.

By the 18th century, Spain's grasp on the Orient was slipping. It was sharing its traditional trade routes with colonial rivals. It was at war with England and fast running out of friends and funds.

Before long, with a big shove from the powerful East India Company, Britain invaded Manila in 1762. But their arrival sparked the same sort of antipathy a busload of hooligans sparks today, and less than two years later the British were chased out of Manila Bay by a homegrown resistance. This action was to have long-lasting consequences, as it marked the start of a united, nationalist spirit. Anticolonial sentiment was reaching new heights as friars and other Spanish colonisers increasingly used brutal methods to try to retain control. By 1894 there were incidents of open rebellion.

A powerful group of nationalist heroes soon emerged. The greatest and most famous of these was Dr José Rizal, doctor of medicine, poet, novelist, sculptor, painter, linguist, naturalist and fencing enthusiast. Executed by the Spanish in 1896, Rizal epitomised the Filipinos' dignified struggle for personal and national freedom. Just before facing the Spanish firing squad, Rizal penned a characteristically calm message of both caution and inspiration to his people: 'I am most anxious for liberties for our country, but I place as a prior condition the education of the people so that our country may have an individuality of its own and make itself worthy of liberties'.

By killing such figures, the Spanish were creating martyrs. Andres Bonifacio led an aggressive movement called the Kataastaasan Kagalang-galangang Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan (Highest and Most Respected Society of the Sons of the Nation) – better known as the Katipunan or KKK. It secretly built a revolutionary government in Manila, with a network of equally clandestine provincial councils. Complete with passwords, masks and coloured sashes denoting rank, the Katipunan's members (both men and women) peaked at an estimated 30,000 in mid-1896. In August, the Spanish got wind of the coming revolution (from a woman's confession to a Spanish friar, according to some accounts) and the Katipunan leaders were forced to flee the capital.

Depleted, frustrated and poorly armed, the Katipuneros took stock in nearby Balintawak, a baryo (district) of Caloocan, and voted to launch the revolution regardless. With the cry 'Mabuhay ang Pilipinas!' (Long live the Philippines!), the Philippine Revolution lurched into life following the incident that is now known as the Cry of Balintawak.

The shortage of weapons among the Filipinos meant that many fighters were forced to pluck their first gun from the hands of their enemies. So acute was the shortage of ammunition for these weapons that some (many of them children) were given the job of scouring battle sites for empty cartridges. These cartridges would then be painstakingly repacked using homemade gunpowder.

After three years of bloodshed, most of it Filipino, a Spanish-Filipino peace pact was signed and the revolutionary leader General Emilio Aguinaldo agreed to go into exile in Hong Kong in 1897. Predictably, the pact's demands satisfied nobody. Promises of reform by the Spanish

The 1904 World's Fair: The Filipino Experience is a page-turning account by Jose D Fermin of the 1100 Filipinos who were taken to the St Louis World's Fair in the US and displayed under zoo-like conditions as examples of colonial triumph.

were broken, as were promises by the Filipinos to stop their revolutionary plotting. The Filipino cause attracted huge support from the Japanese, who tried unsuccessfully to send money and two boatloads of weapons to the exiled revolutionaries in Hong Kong.

THE AMERICAN ERA

Meanwhile, another of Spain's colonial trouble spots – Cuba – was playing host to an ominous dispute over sugar between Spain and the USA. To save face, Spain declared war on the USA; as a colony of Spain, the Philippines was drawn into the conflict. Soon after, an American fleet under Commodore George Dewey sailed into Manila Bay and routed the Spanish ships. Keen to gain Filipino support, Dewey welcomed the return of exiled revolutionary General Aguinaldo and oversaw the Philippine Revolution mark II, which installed Aguinaldo as president of the first Philippine republic.

The Philippine flag was flown for the first time during the proclamation of Philippine Independence on 12 June 1898.

After a bitter struggle, Spanish troops in Manila and outlying towns were crushed by allied American and Filipino forces and Spain's 400-year-long occupation came to an end. With the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898, the Spanish-American War ended and the USA effectively bought the Philippines, Guam and Puerto Rico for US\$20 million.

Back in US-occupied Manila, tempers were rising. Filipino revolutionaries were openly defying the Americans, and the Americans were antagonising the Filipinos. Any dreams of impending Filipino independence were shattered in 1899 when Malolos, the makeshift capital of President Aguinaldo's Philippine Republic, was captured by American troops – led by General Arthur MacArthur.

By 1902 the first Philippine Republic was dead and buried and a succession of American neocolonial governors-general ensured it stayed that way. The main intention of the Americans, like the Spanish, was to serve their own economic needs, and by 1930 they had engineered an industrial and social revolution, with two of the biggest booms coming from mining and prostitution.

Not until 1935, once it had firmly lassoed the country's resources, did the USA endorse the Commonwealth of the Philippines, along with the drafting of a US-style constitution and the first national election. On paper at least, democracy and freedom had at last come to the Philippines, but, as WWII was about to prove, they came at a terrible price.

WORLD WAR II

When Japan bombed Hawaii's Pearl Harbor in 1941, other forces attacked Clark Field, where General Douglas MacArthur was caught napping, despite many hours' warning. Within two days, Japanese troops landed at Vigan in North Luzon, eventually driving the allied Filipino and US troops to the Bataan Peninsula, opposite newly occupied Manila. From here, soldiers and civilians alike faced not only relentless bombardment but also hunger, disease and disillusionment.

MacArthur, holed up on nearby Corregidor island (p117), made his now famous promise to return, and fled to Australia.

Terror in Manila February 1945 is an unflinching account by Antonio Pérez de Olague that documents the destruction of the war-torn city. It is based on hundreds of oral histories by survivors.

The American military practiced for the Vietnam War in the Philippines in the 1950s under the command of General Edward Lansdale, the model for Graham Greene's *The Quiet American*.

1565

An agreement is signed making every Filipino answerable to Spanish law

1569

Legazpi establishes a Spanish stronghold near modern-day Roxas, on Panay

1571

The strategic Muslim settlement of Maynilad (now Manila) is captured and becomes the capital

1762

The British invade Manila but are chased out by the locals

Ordered to maintain a 'holding action', MacArthur's abandoned troops soon fell to the Japanese with the unconditional surrender of around 76,000 people – 66,000 of them Filipinos. Those still able to walk began the 120km 'Bataan death march' from Bataan to San Fernando, and on to prison camps in Capas, Tarlac. As many as 20,000 people died along the way and another 25,000 died while imprisoned. This event is honoured with the annual Araw ng Kagitingan (Bataan Day) public holiday on 9 April. From 1942 to 1945 the Philippines endured a brutal Japanese military regime. Unlike the previous colonial forces, the Japanese actively encouraged Filipino languages as part of the Greater Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere, Japan's scheme of keeping Asia Asian. In 1944 MacArthur landed at Leyte, determined to dislodge the Japanese. The main battleground in this onslaught was Manila, where defenceless residents suffered horrifically in the ensuing crossfire during February 1945. By the time MacArthur marched into the city, at least 150,000 civilians were killed and a city that had been one of the finest in Asia was destroyed. In total, over 1.1 million Filipinos were killed during WWII.

In early 1946 Japan's General Tomoyuki Yamashita was tried as a war criminal and hanged by order of MacArthur. In July of the same year, Manuel Roxas was installed as president of the Republic of the Philippines under the auspices of the USA, and the immense task of rebuilding a war-torn nation began. Far from free, the Philippines faced crippling high-interest loans in the form of US 'aid', and its society (including more than three-quarters of its schools and universities) lay in ruins.

THE MARCOS ERA

First elected in 1965 under the seductive slogan 'This nation can be great again', the charismatic former lawyer Ferdinand Marcos became the first president to win two terms in office. At first it indeed was a new era, and Marcos and his even more charismatic wife Imelda went about trying to bring back some of Manila's pre-war energy. Imelda drove projects like the Cultural Center for the Philippines (p83), which got lots of international attention but, as they say, didn't put food on the table. By 1970, widespread poverty, rising inflation, pitiful public funding and blatant corruption triggered a wave of protests in Manila. When several demonstrators were killed by police outside the presidential Malacañang Palace, Marcos' image as a political saviour died with them. However he still had a hugely powerful backer in the form of the US military, whose Clark and Subic Bay (p130) bases were vital to the Vietnam War.

Citing the rise of leftist student groups and the New People's Army (NPA), Marcos imposed martial law on the entire country in 1972. Normally a constitutional last resort designed to protect the masses, martial law was declared by Marcos to keep himself in power (the constitution prevented him from running for a third term) and to protect his foreign business buddies. By this time, their formidable enemies included the anti-imperialist National Democratic Front (NDF) and the Islamic Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in Mindanao.

With martial law imposed, the Philippines was plunged into a darkness reminiscent of the Japanese occupation – only this time it was at the hands of a fellow Filipino. A curfew was imposed, the media was silenced

or taken over by the military, international travel was banned and thousands of anti-government suspects were rounded up and thrown into military camps. An estimated 50,000 of Marcos' opponents were jailed, exiled or killed. Marcos then set about raising revenue by handing over great tracts of prime land to foreign investors and imposing heavy taxes on those who could least afford them.

When Marcos made a show of lifting martial law in 1981, to silence rising discontent, he reinvented himself and the constitution to form a sham of a democracy. Under this 'New Republic', Marcos won a mid-year election conveniently devoid of a free press or any real opposition.

In 1983, however, when thugs dressed as a military escort gunned down Marcos' political foe, Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino Jr, as he arrived at Manila's airport on return from exile, a new Filipino martyr was created. The two million mourners who poured onto the streets to accompany Aquino's funeral cortege in Manila began a steady march towards a new era.

By 1986 even Marcos' long-time supporters were publicly questioning him, as were many embarrassed foreign powers. Another rigged election saw Marcos beat Ninoy Aquino's widow, Corazon 'Cory' Aquino, but this time the masses stormed the presidential palace. Within days, virtually all members of the nation's armed forces had sided with the masses, the Marcoses were spirited to Hawaii by the US Air Force, and Aquino was installed as president and national heroine.

Thus was the force of the 1986 'people power' movement, or EDSA (Epifanio de los Santos) Revolution (for a more detailed account see the boxed text, p30).

Ferdinand Marcos died in exile in 1989 and his shoe-happy wife, Imelda, soon returned to the Philippines, where she somehow wriggled out of an 18-year jail sentence for graft. Despite evidence that she and Ferdinand helped themselves to billions of dollars from the treasury, Imelda remains free. She even ran for president in 1998 (she 'gave' the votes she garnered to the winner, Joseph Estrada, who in June 1998 asked the courts to give Imelda a presidential pardon; later that year the Supreme Court acquitted Marcos of corruption charges).

POLITICAL UPHEAVAL & HIGH JINKS

The cataclysmic eruption in June 1991 of Mt Pinatubo (p134), northwest of Manila, ended another long chapter in Philippine history. Showered in volcanic ash and refused a new lease agreement, the US military bases at Clark and Subic Bay were closed down and the tens of thousands of US troops left. It was a heady moment for the Philippines, which had turned its back on over US\$100 million a year in rent from the Americans. The 12 senators who voted to oust the US military became national heroes.

But if people thought that ousting both the Marcoses and the Americans would lead to period of political stability, they were wrong. Cory Aquino had helped shepherd through a new constitution that greatly limited presidential power to do undemocratic things like declare martial law or appoint oneself president for life. The first real presidential elections were held in 1992 and showed how messy democracy could be. Aquino's endorsed successor, Defense Secretary Fidel Ramos, won with barely 24% of the vote. This lack of a resounding mandate left people restless.

Inside the Palace Really by Beth Day Romulo documents the rise and fall of the Marcoses – a couple made for drama.

A Country of Our Own takes the controversial view that the Philippines will never be a strong nation because it has never had a unified soul, but author David C Martinez offers possible solutions.

When she fled to the USA in 1986, Imelda Marcos really did leave behind several thousand pairs of shoes.

Empire of Care by Catherine Ceniza Choy shows how Filipino nurses are lured to the US (and Australia and Europe) to fill nursing spots cheaply while the need for thousands at home is unmet.

1896

Dr José Rizal, a powerful figure in the independence movement, is executed by the Spanish

1898

After the US wins the Spanish-American War, the Philippine flag is flown for the first time during the proclamation of independence

1941

Japan invades the Philippines and beats the Americans

1945

In the battles to retake the Philippines, Manila is destroyed and 1.1 million Filipinos are killed

THE BIRTH OF PEOPLE POWER *Chris Rowthorn*

People Power was born in the streets of Manila in February 1986. As the whole world watched the gripping drama unfold on TV, millions of Filipinos, armed only with courage and deep religious faith, poured out onto the streets to defy the military might of the hated Marcos regime. They came from all walks of life – men, women and children, rich and poor, street vendors joining hands with nuns, housewives linking arms with priests, professionals expressing solidarity with the unemployed. Some came with transistor radios around which crowds gathered to hear the latest news, along with admonitions from the head of the influential Roman Catholic Church, Jaime Cardinal Sin, who had been the first to urge the people to this spontaneous uprising. Soon a massive sea of humanity had gathered around Camp Aguinaldo and Camp Crame, along Epifanio de los Santos Avenue, better known as EDSA, where two of Marcos' former ministers, Juan Ponce Enrile and Fidel Ramos, had taken refuge after defecting to the side of the people.

The event marked the end of a long, tumultuous period that started on 21 September 1972, the day Marcos declared martial law, putting an end to a political system that had been called 'a showcase of democracy in Asia'. Without warning, an estimated 50,000 were thrown into detention camps; many of them later vanished without a trace. Among those dispensed with were prominent political figures such as Benigno Aquino Jr, Marcos' principal political rival. Congress was abolished, newspapers and TV stations were summarily shut down, curfew was imposed throughout the country, and anybody even slightly critical of the regime was silenced. Many fled the country and went into exile abroad; others disappeared into the hills and joined the ranks of the New People's Army.

The Philippines languished under Marcos' rule for over 20 years. To be fair, his overextended stay at Malacañang Palace did start legitimately, with the young and charismatic politician with a much-decorated WWII record winning the 1965 presidential election over Liberal Party candidate, Diosdado Macapagal, father of current President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo. Marcos, with his beautiful wife Imelda beside him, swept into office in a Camelot-like atmosphere that recalled the Kennedy years at the White House. But the veneer of glamour soon wore off, and gradually Marcos showed his insatiable hunger for power.

Barred from running for a third term, Marcos engineered a series of civil unrests which he attributed to the rising Communist Party of the Philippines. Among these was an assassination attempt on his Defense Minister, Juan Ponce Enrile, which Enrile himself later disclosed was staged by Marcos' own henchmen. Even at the time not many people were fooled but there was little anybody could do to resist Marcos' imposition of martial law, especially because he had the entire military under his control.

Ever patient and resilient, Filipinos might have continued putting up with life under Marcos were it not for one fatal mistake in the Marcos camp – the assassination of Benigno Aquino Jr

Ramos for his part made national unity a priority. He tried to finally reach peace deals with the patchwork of communist rebels, Muslim separatists and disaffected soldiers who led a rag-tag existence throughout the islands and frequently resorted to violence to score some attention. Some treaties and agreements were worked out, but often as one group would agree to lay down its arms, the members would simply go off and start another conflict.

Meanwhile there was growing discontent among the populace as it became clear that just having your own constitution wasn't enough to shake off years of feeble economic growth. With an economy that had been dependent on the rent from the US bases and Japanese grants

on 21 August 1983. An immensely popular figure who symbolised and embodied the people's desire for freedom, 'Ninoy', as Aquino was known to the masses, was shot dead as he disembarked a China Airlines flight that had brought him back home from exile in the USA. With his death, Filipinos felt they had lost their last hope for a peaceful return to democracy. Filled with deep anguish and despair, some two million mourners followed Ninoy's funeral cortege as it slowly wound its way through the streets of Manila for over twelve hours. They did this out of love for the slain hero but also to show their anger at the regime.

The decline and fall of the Marcos dictatorship came swiftly after that. By 1986, even the USA, which had propped up Marcos all those years as 'a champion of democracy' against the much-feared encroachment of communism in Southeast Asia, began to withdraw its support. With his diminishing political expediency, along with his failing health, Marcos, once a much-hailed American ally, had now become a lame duck.

In the face of mounting criticism abroad and rising unrest at home, Marcos called for snap elections on 7 February 1986. It was a desperate bid to give his rule continued legitimacy. Corazon 'Cory' Aquino, Ninoy's widow, reluctant at first, became the standard bearer of the opposition at the instigation of Cardinal Sin and the Catholic Church. With yellow as their colour (versus red for Marcos 'loyalists'), Cory's supporters chanted 'Cory! Cory! Cory!' as their battle cry. As expected, Marcos came out the winner of the election, but that was the straw that broke the camel's back. This time people had had enough. They knew Cory had been cheated, and they were no longer to be silenced. Amid mounting unrest, Cory went into seclusion in an undisclosed convent. Then the unthinkable happened – the Marcos military machinery started to fall apart.

On 26 February, even as the Marcoses and their diminishing circle of cronies, all dressed in white, staged a victory celebration in Malacañang Palace, the people on EDSA continued to defy tanks massed on the ground and fighter jets flying overhead. They sang, chanted, prayed, shared food and drink, both among themselves and with government troops sent to quell the rebellion. Religious images were placed in front of the tanks, while children offered flowers to the soldiers. These same soldiers refused to fire into crowds and eventually went over to the side of the people. By nightfall, the restless crowds were threatening to storm the palace. At this point, the US stepped in and advised Marcos to 'let go'. Hurriedly the Marcoses boarded a US aircraft and flew to Hawaii and into exile.

In 1896 Filipinos threw off the Spanish colonial yoke and established Asia's first democracy; in 1986 they staged the world's first bloodless revolution, inspiring others to do the same in Burma, China, Korea and the whole of Eastern Europe. The uprising in Tiananmen Square, though it failed, owed much to People Power, as did the tearing down of the Berlin Wall. Likewise the former Czechoslovakia's Velvet Revolution was an heir to those momentous events in the streets of Manila that have become collectively known as People Power.

(which were cleverly designed to turn the Philippines into a market for Japanese goods rather than a competitor), the nation missed out on the economic boom that enriched its neighbours.

In 1998, the people turned to popular ex-movie actor Joseph Estrada and elected him president in a landslide. The colourful Estrada had promised riches for one and all, but the nation was soon to learn, as others have elsewhere, that being a movie actor doesn't necessarily prepare one for a life in politics.

The economy tanked and war broke out with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in central Mindanao. Then, in 2000, Estrada was accused of profiting from an illegal gambling racket. The House of Representatives

1946

The USA withdraws and a sovereign state is declared

1965

Ferdinand Marcos is elected president

1972

Marcos imposes martial law on the Philippines

1983

Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino Jr is assassinated at Manila airport

The Fall of Joseph Estrada is a highly readable account by Amando Dovonila of the rise and crash of the actor who tried to be president during the late 1990s.

impeached him but allies in the Senate managed to block his removal from office. In 2001, millions of Filipinos took to the streets and said 'enough'. Estrada and his family took flight and the vice-president, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (popularly called 'GMA') was sworn in as president.

Estrada tried a few ploys to regain power – like calling for yet another 'people's revolution' – but it was for naught. GMA quickly set about consolidating her power and she allowed the American military back into the country as part of the 'war on terror'. In 2004 she ran for reelection against an ensemble cast of characters that included another ex-actor, Fernando Poe Jr, and won by 1.1 million votes. Or did she? Shortly thereafter a recording emerged that purported to capture GMA ordering that the election be fixed. Political opponents seized on this and for the next year, much of the government's time was spent debating the charges of election fraud. GMA's opponents tried to raise the ire of the public – but perhaps jaded by the outcomes of previous revolutions, the populace mostly stayed off the streets.

By late 2005, GMA seemed to have survived this latest political upheaval, as the Philippines continued to suffer from high unemployment, poverty and other problems that have bedevilled it for decades.

1986

'People Power' helps chase Marcos from the Philippines and install Corazon 'Cory' Aquino as president

1991

Mt Pinatubo erupts and the Americans leave their huge military bases

The Culture

THE NATIONAL PSYCHE

Probably the first thing you'll notice about the people of the Philippines is their calm demeanour. Filipinos greet adversity with all the fuss that a *kalabaw* greets a fly on its back – they shrug their shoulders, smile and move on. This whatever-will-be-will-be attitude is called *bahala na*, a phrase that expresses the idea that all things shall pass and in the meantime life is to be lived.

Bahala na has more than a little to do with the Philippines' greatest paradox: despite years of injustice at the hands of colonial and home-grown rulers, and despite being for the most part dirt poor, Filipinos are the happiest people in Asia. This incongruous *joie de vivre* is perhaps best symbolised by that quirkiest of national icons, the jeepney. Splashed with colour, laden with religious icons and festooned with sanguine scribbles, the jeepney openly flaunts the fact that, at heart, it's a dilapidated, smoke-belching pile of scrap metal. Like the jeepney, poor Filipinos face their often dim prospects in life with a laugh and a wink.

Another force that shapes Filipino life is *hiya*, which roughly means 'sense of shame'. Showing a lack of *hiya* in front of others is similar to 'losing face' and, for a Filipino, there are few worse fates. Expressing strong or negative emotions in public are sure ways to show you are *walang-hiya* – without shame. Many foreigners can't accept that, because of *hiya*, Filipinos tend to care more about what others think than about doing the right thing. Yet most problems that travellers run into result from a lack of respect for *hiya* and *amor propio* (self-esteem). The golden rule when travelling in the Philippines is to treat problems graciously; a smile and a joke goes a long way, while anger or sullenness just makes things worse.

Alas, there's a dark side to *hiya* and *amor propio*. Despite outward appearances, Filipinos can hold a grudge with the best of them. Because of *hiya*, these grudges tend to fester until they are settled behind the scenes, often in unsavoury fashion. The Philippines leads the world in journalists killed for their work (see p38) – not surprising if you consider that being publicly outed for a misdeed is to suffer *hiya* in the gravest manner possible.

But the family is an even more potent force shaping the national psyche than *bahala na* or *hiya*. The Filipino family unit, or 'kinship group', extends to distant cousins, multiple godparents, and one's *barkada* (gang of friends); it is both large and intensely close-knit. Rich or poor, Filipino families protect their own, the public good be damned. This explains many things that observers often cite as 'wrong' with the country: it explains why rich, powerful clans are content to build huge fortunes while turning a blind eye to shocking poverty; it explains why Filipinos routinely urinate on city pavements and pollute public spaces; and it explains why the best qualified are passed over in favour of the well connected when applying for jobs.

Despite this, and despite a long history of hardship under the Spanish and Americans, rich and poor Filipino families alike extend nothing but the highest degree of warmth and hospitality towards foreign visitors.

LIFESTYLE

First-time visitors to Manila are often lulled into thinking the Philippines is Westernised. They soon realise that the chain restaurants, shopping malls and American R&B music disguise a unique Asian culture still very much rooted in an ancient values system.

President Ferdinand Marcos planned to rename the country Maharlika, or 'noble man', until an academic pointed out the word also has the meaning 'big erection'.

THE HAPPIEST PEOPLE ON EARTH *Chris Rowthorn*

In a global survey conducted in 2005, Filipinos came out among the world's happiest people, much to the Filipinos' delight, surprise, and bemusement. As Filipinos see it, they're no happier than anybody else on earth. In fact, generally speaking, Filipinos tend to take a rather unfavourable view of themselves, particularly in comparison with the wealth of Americans, the old culture of Europeans, the industry of the Chinese, the discipline of the Japanese, and so forth.

But one thing Filipinos have is a boundless sense of humour, and this extends to a rare ability to laugh at themselves. Perhaps it's a kind of defence mechanism, but even in the grim days under the Marcos dictatorship they endlessly cracked jokes about the police, the military, and anybody and anything connected with the despised regime. Marcos was the butt of countless jokes, as was his wife Imelda.

While laughing at their problems, Filipinos are in effect also poking fun at their own helplessness. Filipinos detest anything that acts as an obstacle to their fundamental love of life and freedom, yet sometimes, when faced with difficulty, a Filipino's reaction is to laugh. To the casual observer this may seem like an inexplicable bit of frivolity in the face of adversity, but there's more to it than meets the eye. To Filipinos, freedom is more precious than material wealth, and if they laugh at something that curtails or threatens this priority, it's simply a way of coming to terms with the situation until they find a way to overcome it.

Filipinos speak some 70 languages and dialects, yet in none of them are there words for depression, anxiety, anguish or even boredom. This says a lot about the natural disposition of Filipinos. Unlike some other cultures where suicide is seen as an honourable way out, the traditional Filipino way of thinking does not even consider it an option. No matter how big the problem or how profound the tragedy, to a Filipino life goes on, it must go on, and that's all there is to it.

The average Filipino has very modest dreams: to have just enough to feed the family and be able to enjoy the simple pleasures of life. Filipinos may be poor in material things but as long as there's love and laughter they will find plenty to be happy about.

For centuries, the two most important influences on the lives of Filipinos have been family and religion. The most basic political unit, the *barangay*, is merely an extension of the family-based community unit that defined the social structure in pre-Hispanic times. The idea of working together for the common good, virtually nonexistent at the national level, is alive and well at the *barangay* level, where it's known as *bayanihan*. Originally a rural entity, the *barangay* today is no less relevant in urban shanty towns, where a healthy cooperative spirit is essential for survival.

Within the family unit, respect for elders is paramount; putting one's grandparents in a nursing home is frowned upon. Almost without exception, all members of one's kinship group are afforded loyalty and respect. As a result, homosexuality is tolerated, despite the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church.

Filipino families, especially poor ones, tend to be large. It's not uncommon for a dozen family members to live together in a tiny apartment, shanty or *nipa* hut. Because of this, personal space is not the issue for Filipinos that it is for Westerners. Foreign visitors to Philippine resorts are often amazed – or appalled – when a family of 10 takes up residence in the room next door, complete with pets, video machine and cooking equipment.

While bulging urban centres like Manila and Cebu gradually adapt to the modern world, in the countryside the traditional rhythms of life are surprisingly resilient. They centre on the sun, sea, rivers and fields; clocks are superfluous. 'Filipino time', which implies 'fashionably late' in Manila, might mean 'a few days late' in rural *barangays*. Frequent

political turmoil at the national level goes practically unnoticed in rural *barangays* due to poor communication lines and the primacy of local politics. In the most remote provinces, such as Kalinga, old scores are still settled by the sword and punishment is doled out in accordance with traditional tribal codes.

The final thread in the fabric of Filipino society is the overseas worker. Nearly one in 10 Filipinos work abroad. Official figures show that they send about US\$8.5 billion per year back home, or about 10% of the GDP, but the true figure is probably much higher than that. The Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) – the nurse in Canada, the construction worker in Qatar, the entertainer in Japan, the maid in Singapore – has become a national hero, actively supported by the government through a specifically dedicated department, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration. When OFWs retire, they often return to their home provinces as *balikbayan* (literally 'returnees to the home country') and build gaudy concrete homes.

POPULATION

The Philippines' population, thought to be between 80 million and 90 million (the 2005 census was cancelled for budgetary reasons), is among the fastest growing in Asia. While the government claims the growth rate is slowing, most experts disagree. If the experts are right, the population will reach 100 million before the end of the decade.

Few outside the Catholic Church and its allies in the national government believe that the exploding population is anything but a major impediment to solving the country's poverty woes. Since the Philippine economy rarely grows as fast as the population in real terms, per-capita income has remained stagnant for years. By vehemently opposing all forms of 'artificial' birth control, the Catholic Church has almost single-handedly precluded an Indonesia-style family-planning program.

As it grows, the country's population gets younger and more urban. Nearly a quarter of the population are between 17 and 25 years old. About half of all people in this once overwhelmingly rural archipelago now live in urban areas. More than one in eight Filipinos live in Metro Manila alone; that figure rises to one in four if you include the crowded neighbouring provinces of Batangas, Bulacan, Cavite, Laguna and Rizal.

In stark contrast to Metro Manila, the mountainous provinces of central Luzon and hard-to-reach coastal provinces like Eastern Samar, Aurora and Palawan are sparsely settled. Many of the people in these provinces are subsistence farmers living on the fringe of the cash economy.

MULTICULTURALISM

Ethnologically, the vast majority of Filipinos are related to Malaysians and Indonesians. Culturally, they represent both East and West, having welcomed migrants from China, Vietnam, Taiwan, Japan, Korea, the USA, Europe and India.

Defined by language, the Philippines has more than 100 cultural minority groups, many of which can be divided into three main, blurred groups: the Negrito, the Igorot and Manobo. While there is a long history of intolerance toward cultural minorities in the Philippines, most atrocities were perpetrated years ago by the Spanish and the Americans, as well as the Marcos administration. Filipinos are tolerant by nature and not inclined to discriminate against immigrants or minorities. Notably, the ongoing Abu Sayyaf terrorist campaign in Mindanao and Sulu has not created a major backlash by average Filipinos against Muslims.

Anything you need to know about Philippine population demographics is at www.census.gov.ph/index.html.

All of that said, indigenous peoples have had several well-publicised clashes with the government over human rights abuses and land rights; the Kalinga famously resisted a government plan to dam the Chico River in the 1970s. The Marcos years were full of such injustices, and distrust of the government among indigenous peoples lingers to this day.

The Negrito

Often referred to as the aborigines of the Philippines, the Negrito are represented by the Aeta, Ati, Eta, Ita and Dumagat peoples. Now thought to number as few as 20,000, the Negrito are generally the shortest, darkest and most racially victimised of the Filipino people. The Negrito mainly live on the coastal fringes of North Luzon and in the highlands of Negros, Samar, Leyte and Panay, where the famously festive Ati are said to have initiated the present-day Ati-Atihan festivals in Kalibo and surrounding towns.

The Igorot

The Cordillera region of Luzon is home to the mountain-dwelling tribes collectively known as the Igorot. They include the Apayao (or Isneg), Kalinga, Ifugao, Benguet, Bontoc and Tingguian (or Itneg). While generally considered unbowed by outside pressures, many Igorot traditions were suppressed first by the Spanish and then by the Americans. However, most Igorot rituals, fashions and beliefs remain in some form and some rural villagers continue to live much as their ancestors did, tending to rice terraces and living off the land.

The Apayao are traditionally slash-and-burn agriculturists who live in the highlands of provinces such as Abra, Ilocos Norte and Kalinga-Apayao. Fierce warriors, the Apayao were the last Igorot tribe to succumb to the military might of the Americans in the 1920s. Apayao tribes are known for their strong spirituality and ceremonial feasts, known as *say-am*.

The Kalinga, once the fiercest Igorot head-hunters, are now known for their finely woven textiles and age-old songs like the *ading*, *wasani* and *dandanag*. These typically accompany the *bodong* (peace rite) after a tribal war has been settled.

The Ifugao, whose name comes from a word meaning 'people of the earth', are former head-hunters, nonpareil woodcarvers and, most famously, the creators of the Banaue rice terraces, the so-called 'eighth wonder of the world'.

The Benguet people of the southwest Cordillera include the Ibaloi and Kankanay tribes. The Ibaloi, centred on Kabayan, are the world's foremost practitioners of mummification. The Kankanay live in the northern regions of Benguet Province and parts of Mountain Province.

The Bontoc are another former head-hunting tribe famed for their rich social traditions and colourful weavings. The Bontoc share a formal system of social division and courtship that centres on segregated 'dormitories' known as *ulog* or *egban*.

With the northwestern Luzon province of Abra as their ancestral domain, the Tingguian are known for their beautifully woven *kinamay*an blankets and durable houses.

The Manobo

The term Manobo is used to describe the major indigenous groups of Mindanao. Of these groups, five regard themselves as Muslim – the Badjao, Maguindanao, Maranao (or Maranaw), Tausag (or Tausug) and Samal.

Regarded as the least Islamic of the Muslim groups, the animist Badjao are the 'sea gypsies' of the Sulu seas. The Maguindanao are the largest

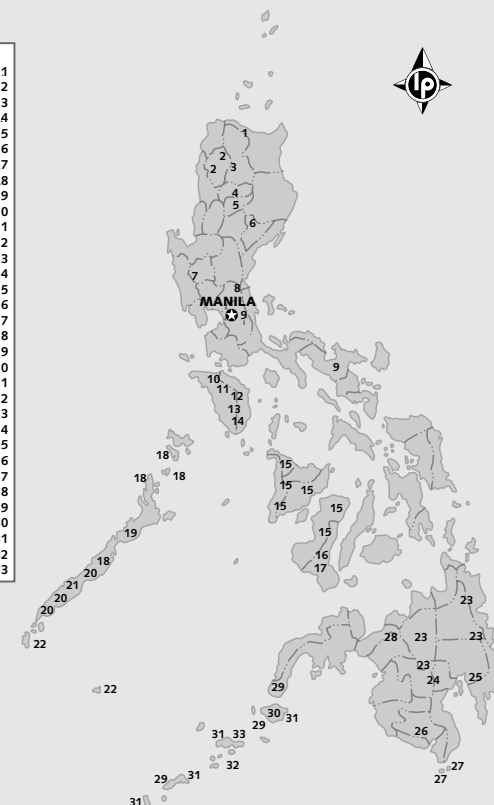
The National Commission for Culture and the Arts' outstanding website (www.ncca.gov.ph) contains primers on all Philippine artistic genres and background on the various ethnic groups and tribes.

In 1971 National Geographic was convinced that a Stone Age tribe of less than 30 people, the Tasaday, had been discovered in Mindanao. It wasn't until 1986 that the Tasaday were revealed as local T'boli tribespeople in on a hoax.

CULTURAL MINORITIES

0 400 km
0 250 miles

CULTURAL MINORITIES	
Ita (Negrito).....	1
Tingguian (Itneg).....	2
Apayao (Isneg).....	3
Bontocs.....	4
Kalinga.....	5
Ifugao.....	6
Aya (Negrito).....	7
Dumagat (Negrito).....	8
Agta (Negrito).....	9
Iraya (Mangyan).....	10
Alangan (Mangyan).....	11
Tadyawan (Mangyan).....	12
Buid (Mangyan).....	13
Hanunoo (Mangyan).....	14
Ati (Negrito).....	15
Ata (Negrito).....	16
Bukidnon.....	17
Tagbanua.....	18
Batak.....	19
Pala'wan.....	20
Tau't Batu.....	21
Jama Mapun (Muslim).....	22
Manobo.....	23
Bagobo.....	24
Mandaya, Mansaka.....	25
T'boli.....	26
Sangir.....	27
Maranao (Muslim).....	28
Subanon.....	29
Samal (Muslim).....	30
Yakan (Muslim).....	31
Badjao.....	32
Tausug (Muslim).....	33



of all the Muslim groups, famed for their skills as musicians and weavers. The Maranao are the traditional owners of Lake Lanao, and are among the Philippines' most ingenious craftspeople. The Tausag were the earliest Filipino Islamic converts back in the 15th century and as such were the ruling class of the Jolo Sultanate. The Samal are the poorest of the Muslim groups, having long been the loyal subjects of the Tausag dynasties.

The main non-Muslim indigenous groups of Mindanao are the Bukidnon, Bagobo, Mandaya and Mansaka.

RELIGION

The Philippines is the only predominantly Christian country in Asia – almost 90% of the population claims to be Christian. Over 80% of Filipinos are Roman Catholic. The largest religious minority is Muslim (5%), although Islam is actually an older presence than Christianity. Filipino Muslims live chiefly in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and belong to the mainstream Sunni sect.

Popular Christian sects include the Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons (Church of Latter-Day Saints) and various brands of southern Baptists. Guards at the Protestant Iglesia Ni Cristo churches, a neo-Christian sect with gothic revival-style churches all over the country, bar entry to nonmembers and ex-members who drink or gamble. The Catholic-based El Shaddai church, led by the colourful Brother Mike Velarde, has millions of followers.

While the separation of church and state is formalised in the Filipino constitution, the tentacles of the Catholic Church extend deep into national and local politics. A subtle hint from the church can swing a mayoral race and mean millions of votes for presidential or congressional candidates.

The ebbs and flows of the Filipino calendar year are also deeply influenced by the Catholic Church. The entire nation takes several days off around Easter for Holy Week, when thousands of devotees take part in *pasyon* or *pabasa* (all-night reading or chanting of passages from the Bible) and pilgrims flock to churches as part of the *Visita Iglesia*. Christ's passion and death are observed in stagings of *senakulo*, realistic re-enactments of the Crucifixion (complete with actual nails).

To the dismay of the Catholic Church, Filipinos remain stubbornly committed to a host of spirits, goblins and superstitions, which have their roots in primeval animist beliefs. Such beliefs still prevail in the upland tribes of North Luzon, Palawan, Mindoro and Mindanao, where people genuinely believe that caves and forests are inhabited by spirits and witches.

Urban Filipinos also consult a range of faith healers, psychics, fortune tellers, tribal shamans and self-help books. Visitors to Manila will immediately notice the fondness that cab and bus drivers have for protective religious icons and supernatural talismans.

WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines has elected two female presidents in the last 20 years, and plenty of other women have held positions of power since the country became independent in 1945. Photos of the House of Representatives dating back as far as the '50s and '60s reveal a chamber that was regularly 20% to 25% female.

Many credit 18th-century revolutionary leader Gabriela Silang with paving the way for the future success of women in the Philippines. Like Cory Aquino, who helped topple the Marcos regime, Silang was the widow of an assassinated dissident. Her husband, Diego, led a revolt against the Spanish in Ilocos in 1762. When he was killed in 1763, Gabriela took over the resistance movement, fighting the Spanish valiantly for another four months before she was captured and publicly hanged in Vigan.

Not all Filipinas reach such lofty heights. Women who are not rich enough to afford household help are expected to fulfil most of the child-rearing, cooking and household duties. While men are allowed – even expected – to have a *querida* (mistress), women guilty of marital transgressions will be shunned by society and beaten or dumped by their husbands. A 2003 survey showed that 9% of Filipino women had been victims of domestic abuse. In 2004 President Arroyo signed a law increasing the penalties for spousal and child abuse, but as with most laws in the Philippines it is enforced selectively if at all.

MEDIA

The Philippines has a vibrant and vocal free press, as anyone who glances at a newsstand or surfs the local TV channels will notice. After 20 years of censorship under Marcos, the downfall of the regime ushered in a new

PROSTITUTION IN THE PHILIPPINES

Prostitution and its most insidious form, child prostitution, is a major social issue in the Philippines. Various estimates put the number of sex workers in the Philippines at about 400,000, with up to 20% of those children. Most prostitutes come from impoverished provincial families and are easy prey for the girlie bars, which take a majority cut of their earnings in exchange for bare-essential living arrangements and protection from the police.

Female Prostitution

The Philippines is one of the biggest sex-tourism destinations in the world. Many tourists are single men who visit sex-tourism hot spots like Angeles, though every big city and quite a few smaller places cater to this business. In some European and Japanese magazines, the Philippines is actively promoted as a prime sex-tourism destination. Among the major sex-tour operators is Japanese organised-crime group Yakuzas.

Although prostitution is officially illegal in the Philippines, you don't have to be a detective to find it being practised. The red-light districts of most big cities operate openly and freely, with karaoke bars, 'discos', go-go bars and strip clubs all acting as fronts. The call girls are euphemistically called 'GROs' – guest relations officers. The police, many of whom are paid off by the sex industry, turn a blind eye to the problem. As a result, few foreigners have been prosecuted.

The Asia-Pacific office of the **Coalition Against Trafficking in Women** (% 02-426 9873; www.catw-ap.org) is located in Quezon City, Manila. Its website has information about prostitution in the Philippines and several useful links.

Child Prostitution

A dreadful culture of silence surrounds child sex abuse in the Philippines. While *hija* plays a big role in the silence, for the most part this silence is bought. There's big money to be made in paedophilia, both by ringleaders who arrange meetings between paedophiles and children, and by law enforcers who get paid to turn a blind eye. Despite strict laws, the number of foreigners charged and convicted for child sex crimes in the Philippines is so low as to be an encouragement to foreign paedophiles.

Child-sex tourism is a criminal offence in many countries around the world. Extraterritorial laws in Australia, New Zealand, the USA and many EU countries mean that prosecution and punishment can occur in an offender's country of residence, even when the crime took place overseas. In addition to these laws, tougher action (including imprisonment) is now being taken in countries that have been documented as centres for child sexual exploitation.

Travellers can contact the Quezon City office of **End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism** (ECPAT; % 02-925 2803; www.ecpat.net), a global network of organisations that work to stop child prostitution, child pornography and the traffic of children for sexual purposes.

era for the press as independent newspapers and magazines mushroomed overnight. (For suggestions of what to read, watch or listen to, see p432.)

But in one way a free press has also proved an anathema to Filipino society, which prefers to keep its dirty laundry secret. Between 2000 and 2005, 22 journalists were killed in the Philippines, more than anywhere else in the world besides Iraq. As of 2005, not one person had been convicted for any of those murders. 17 of the 22 victims were radio commentators.

There's an unfortunate tendency in some circles to blame the journalists for the problem. In 2005, First Husband Mike Arroyo caused an uproar when he said that the reason no journalists had been killed in the province of Negros was because journalists there were 'responsible reporters'. While Filipino media outlets may go over the top once in a while, they do not deserve Mr Arroyo's suggestion that violence against 'irresponsible reporters' is justified.

The documentary *Imelda* (2004) is a telling look into the psyche of Imelda Marcos, who cooperated with Filipina-American director Ramona Diaz in making the film, then later tried to block its Manila release.

ARTS Music

The Philippines' burgeoning music scene is a phenomenon that increasingly unites the diverse range of Filipinos. 'OPM', as Filipino music is known (it stands for Original Pinoy Music), encompasses a wide spectrum of rock ('Pinoy rock'), folk and new-age genres – plus a subgenre that includes all three.

Embodying the latter subgenre is Pinikpikan, a sometimes-frantic fusion of tribal styles and modern jam-band rock. The 11-piece band uses a plethora of bamboo reed pipes, flutes, and percussion instruments and sings in dialects as diverse as Visayan, French and Bicol. Grace Nono is another artist who is squarely in the new-age jungle milieu, but she's a whole lot mellower. She croons deeply spiritual lyrics in a strangely melodic tribal squawk.

Moving toward the Pinoy rock mainstream, the eponymous band fronted by Bamboo dominates the air waves – and, even more tellingly, the cover-band playlists. The slightly grungy rockers weigh in with a heady mixture of political invective and ballads laden with angst-ridden garage rock. Even more popular is the sometimes sweet, sometimes surly diva Kitchie Nadal, who is starting to tour internationally. Rounding out the big three is the agreeable Rivermaya, formerly fronted by Bamboo. One rung down on the popularity charts, Cynthia Alexander and Barbie Almalbis supply Lisa Loeb-style ballads. All of the above sing in both Filipino and English.

The heyday of Pinoy rock was 30 years ago, when blues-rock outfits like the Juan de la Cruz Band, Anakbayan and Maria Cafrá ruled the roost. These '70s bands looked and sounded the part, with long hair, bandanas and endless, soulful electric-guitar riffs. The Juan de la Cruz Band, which incidentally counted no 'Juan de la Cruz' (equivalent to 'Joe Blow' in English) among its members, is credited with inventing Pinoy rock by busting out lyrics in Filipino – the first big act to do so. From those humble origins evolved the Eraserheads, the country's first modest international success. This four-man band, known as the Philippines' Beatles, rose to prominence in the early '90s with catchy guitar-heavy alt rock. There's also the Philippines' U2 – The Dawn, a vaguely new age '80s band – and the Philippines' Elvis, '60s actor-singer Eddie Mesa.

Folk music has solid roots in the Philippines. Freddie Aguilar's 'Anak', a song about parent-child relations, propelled him to fame at the beginning of the People Power revolution in the 1980s. Joey Ayala and his sister, Cynthia Alexander, play progressive folk infused with tribal elements. Aguilar plays frequently at his bar, Fame, in Tagaytay, while Cynthia Alexander runs Conspiracy Bar in Quezon City.

KARAOKE

Many Westerners would sooner have their wisdom teeth removed without anaesthetic than spend an evening listening to inebriated amateurs pay homage to Celine Dion and Julio Iglesias. But when Filipinos want to unwind, they often do it with karaoke – or 'videoke' as it's known throughout the Philippines.

Filipinos are unabashed about belting out a tune, whenever and wherever, alone or in company. They pursue the craft without a hint of irony, which means that criticising or making fun of someone's performance is decidedly taboo, and may even provoke violence.

With all that videoke going on it can be awfully hard to find peace and quiet in certain tourist hot spots. If loud, unmelodious singing grates like fingernails on a blackboard, stick to resorts run by foreigners, which tend to be less videoke-friendly.

In 1942 Filipino statesman Carlos P. Romulo became the first Asian to win a Pulitzer Prize, for a series of articles on pre-WWII Asia.

Some of the big OPM acts have websites where you can (sometimes) download song samples. Try www.kitchenadal.com, www.pinikpikan.com or www.rivermaya.net. For OPM gossip and info try www.philmusic.com.

Dating from the late 19th century, the *kundiman* genre, with its bitter-sweet themes of love, fate and death, remains one of the best-loved modes of musical expression in the Philippines. Traditional musical instruments used in *kundiman* include the *kudyapi*, a hauntingly melodic lute, and the *kulintang*, a row of small gongs mounted on a *langkungan*, a resonating platform.

One Filipino performer who has won international acclaim is Lea Salonga, the original *Miss Saigon*. Cecile Licad has likewise built herself a name globally, principally in Japan, the USA and Europe, as an interpreter of the piano music of Chopin and Schumann. A good overview of the classical music scene can be found at www.culturalcenter.gov.ph.

Cinema & TV

Southeast Asia's most prolific and diverse film industry is undergoing a profound transition. The country's mainstream studios put out fewer than 40 movies in 2004, down from an all-time high of 297 in 1997. Big-budget foreign films are the main culprit, although the local film industry's failure to shed its low-brow, action-flick straitjacket has plenty to do with it.

The flip side is that an independent film industry is starting to emerge, although finding screenings of indie films can be a challenge. A couple of malls in Manila, SM Megamall and Robinsons Place, regularly dedicate a screen to digitally produced independent films, but they usually run without subtitles. There's also the Manila Film Festival in December.

Of the Filipino directors, Erik Matti and Jeffrey Jeturian do some good work for the big studios; Jon Redd is an indie director to look out for.

The movie industry's golden age was the 1950s, when Filipino films won countless awards and Manila was Asia's undisputed movie capital. Things tapered off in the 1960s but peaked again in the 1970s as the industry found a voice amid the repressive censorship of the Marcos regime. The '80s saw thousands of low-budget, shoot-'em-up thrillers churned out by big Manila studios imitating Hollywood. Such films only became more popular when sex was introduced into the equation in the '90s – a genre dubbed 'bold'.

Over the years, the Philippines has also served as a backdrop for many big foreign films, most notably *Apocalypse Now* and *Platoon*.

As for TV, the two big national networks, GMA and ABS-CBN, compete fiercely for audience through Filipino-language programming aimed at the lowest common denominator. Racy Latin American-style variety shows, cheap local soaps and action movies are all common. Cable TV has plenty of both good and awful American and British programming.

Literature

The grandfather of Filipino literature was national hero José Rizal (p26). His groundbreaking 1887 work *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not) and its 1891 sequel, *El Filibusterismo* (The Reign of Greed), continue to interest modern readers with their detailed and insightful observations of Filipino society under Spanish rule. Rizal's *Mi Ultimo Adios* (My Last Farewell), penned in Spanish on the eve of his execution in 1896, is a masterpiece of verse.

Literature was primarily a religious tool under the Spanish, who banned the works of perceived nationalists like Rizal and the 19th-century epic-poet Francisco Balagtas, one of the first Filipinos to write in Filipino. Then the Americans came and brought their brand of crisp storytelling with them. The American influence remained strong after WWII, when the giants of modern Filipino English-language literature emerged: Nick

Cavite, directed by a pair of Filipino Americans, is a low-budget political thriller that transplants the viewer to the sweltering streets of Manila. It did the international film festival rounds in 2005.

The Great Raid (2005), about the rescue of 500 American POWs from a camp north of Manila in WWII, was shot in Australia but features several popular Filipino actors, including Cesar Montano.

Crying Ladies (2003), a comedy about three women offered jobs to sob at a Chinese wake, showcases hot new Filipino director Mark Meily and the country's top actress, Sharon Cuneta.

ECO BEAUTIES

As soccer is to Brazilians, beauty pageants are to Filipinos. And when you combine beauty pageants with environmental awareness you get the Manila-based Miss Earth. This contest, where women from around the world compete for the title, has dozens of smaller feeder pageants throughout the country, the winners of which achieve local acclaim and temporary honours. (Miss Manila 1953, Imelda Marcos, is of course an example of a pageant queen who ascended to greater heights.) Miss Earth is a pageant with a cause, and the candidates are expected to get involved with the Department of Tourism's efforts in promoting the country domestically and abroad.

In the casual interview category in Miss Earth, university engineering student Marie Sizjiarto, the 2004 Miss Philippines winner, stated 'I would try to put nature in the hearts of people.' The runner-up's slightly less poetic response 'to vanquish the inimical attitude of the people towards the environment' might have cost her the victory.

Joaquin, the avant-garde poet José Garcia Villa and F Sionil Jose, whose voluminous works depict the struggles of ordinary Filipinos and skewer the privileged class's pretensions. Other favourite targets of Jose's novels are the Spaniards, the Americans and Marcos.

A number of expatriate writers have written books set in Manila that are fun to read while visiting.

Architecture

Since long before the Spanish arrived, the simple, utilitarian nipa hut has defined Filipino architecture. The most basic nipa hut is made of wood and bamboo, with a roof of palm thatch – cool and breezy in hot weather and easily repaired if damaged by typhoons.

The Spanish brought new forms of architecture, such as the *bahay na bato* (stone house) and squat, fortresslike 'earthquake-baroque' churches. But the basic design of the nipa hut endured. By the 19th century, Filipinos of means were building hybrid residences that mixed Spanish and Asian styles with elements of the nipa hut. These composite structures, distinguishable by their capiz-shell windows and huge upstairs *sala* (living room), remain the most elegant and distinctive architectural specimens the Philippines has to offer. The Spanish colonial city of Vigan (p147) is the best place to view them, although you will sometimes stumble across fine examples in the most remote barangays.

The American era was characterised by neoclassical architecture, evident in many of Manila's government buildings. During the 1930s, local architects introduced novel forms of art deco to the urban landscape, such as the Metropolitan Theater in Manila (p77). The 1970s saw the emergence of the massive ferro-concrete creations of Leandro Locsin, who designed the Cultural Center of the Philippines (p82) and the Central Bank of the Philippines. Today the contemporary urban landscape is dominated by tinted-glass high-rises such as the corporate buildings along Ayala Ave in Makati and the residential towers of Fort Bonifacio.

Theatre

The older, wiser brother of the local movie industry, Filipino theatre evolved from marathon chants and epic legends, such as the Ifugao *hudhud* (p175), recited by early Filipinos. In the 17th century the Spaniards introduced *sinakulos* – passion plays depicting the life and death of Christ – to convert the locals to Christianity. Other early forms of theatre were the *moro-moro*, which glorified the Christian struggle against Muslims in the 19th century, and a light, localised musical form known as *sar-*

Ghosts of Manila (1994) by James Hamilton-Paterson is a chilling yet entertaining 'docufiction' of life, death and the corrupt chains binding Filipinos in the city's slums.

Movie stars, generals and nobodies form a weird pastiche of characters in Jessica Hagedorn's dark comedy *Dogeaters* (1990), a thinly veiled look at life in Manila during the pivotal 1960s and 1970s.

suela, which was used to protest American occupation at the outset of the 20th century.

When the Americans arrived, English became the language of the national theatrical scene. The journalist, novelist and playwright Nick Joaquin wrote his signature work, *Portrait of a Young Artist as a Filipino*, in 1951. Other important playwrights of the 20th century were Rolando Tinio, whose Filipino adaptations of English-language classics such as Shakespeare's tragedies remain unparalleled in their field; and Rene Villanueva, best known for his children's books but also highly regarded as a playwright.

Contemporary playwrights blend tradition with the issues of the day. The Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA) has an excellent development program for up-and-coming playwrights. Relatively recent productions include Nick Pichay's modern adaptation of the *hudhud*, and Floy Quintos' satirical *Fluid*, which skewers Manila's social climber-laced arts scene.

Painting & Sculpture

The most recognisable form of artwork in the Philippines is centuries old and, in fact, wasn't conceived as artwork; the *bulol*, the sacred wood figures carved by the Ifugao, have for centuries been used to guard rice fields. The names of the sculptors were rarely recorded, but elder Ifugao can often identify the sculptor of original *bulol* based on the statue's style. Reproductions of these powerful statues flood souvenir shops across the country.

Modern Filipino sculpture is epitomised by Guillermo Tolentino's neoclassical masterpiece in Caloocan City, the resplendent *Monumento*, honouring the revolutionary hero Andres Bonifacio. Another name visitors may notice is Jose Mendoza, whose sculptures adorn the streets of Makati.

Painting in the Spanish era was dominated by the two unchallenged masters of Filipino art: Juan Luna and Felix Resurreccion Hidalgo. Luna's vast *Spoliarium* and Hidalgo's *Antigone* stunned European art circles when they won Gold and Silver Medals at the prestigious 1884 Madrid Exposition.

The early 20th century saw the rise of the masters Fabian de la Rosa and Fernando Amorsolo. De la Rosa's work is distinguished by disciplined composition and brushwork, while Amorsolo painted quintessential rural Philippine scenes and subjects in a free-flowing, impressionist style.

Vicente Manansala, Arturo Luz, Anita Magsaysay Ho, Fernando Zobel and Hernando Ocampo were among the great Filipino modernists who emerged after WWII. Zobel toyed with cubism before becoming the country's foremost abstractionist. The brilliant ethnic-Chinese painter Ang Kiukok, who studied under Manansala, opened eyes with his violent cubist paintings of fighting cocks, stray dogs and tormented lovers.

The contemporary Filipino art scene is ever abuzz, although it's usually hard to separate the great hopes from the great hypes. The conceptual artist David Cortez Medalla, based in Britain, has pioneered avant-garde art movements such as minimalism and performance art. Jordan Mendoza, son of Jose, is an up-and-coming sculptor. In addition to being well received internationally, artist-with-a-conscience Benedicto Cabrera ('Bencab') has dedicated considerable effort to the development of contemporary art. He has also created a Tam-awan artists' village in Baguio, which aims to preserve and teach the art and culture of the Cordillera people.

Dance

From the dances in mainstream urban society to those performed in small town fiestas and in remote tribal barangays, Filipino dance is as rich and varied as the islands themselves.

You can read Rizal's *Mi Ultimo Adios* in English at www.philippines-travel-guide.com/mi-ultimo-adios.html.

William Boyd's *The Blue Afternoon* (1993), which won the Los Angeles Times Book Prize in 1996, skilfully weaves US-Philippine military relations into a love story/detective drama partly set in Manila in 1902.

Alex Garland's *The Tesseract* (1999), a thrilling romp through Manila's dark side, was the second novel penned by the author of the 1996 cult backpacker hit, *The Beach*.

F Sionil Jose's *Ermita* (1988) is an engrossing story about privileged society in the post-WWII years; his five-novel Rosales saga follows the trials of a family from 1872 through the Marcos years.

The Philippines' national folk dance is the *tinikling*, which involves a boy and a girl hopping between bamboo poles, held just above the ground and struck together in time to music or hand-clapping. Some say this dance was inspired by the flitting of birds between grass stems or a heron hopping through the rice paddies. A version of the *tinikling* is the breathtaking *singkil*, where a Muslim princess and her lady-in-waiting weave in and out of four poles struck together at increasing speed.

The mountain people of North Luzon are famed for vigorous hunting dances such as the *tag-gam* and victory dances such as *balangbang*. Down south, an old favourite is the graceful *pangalay*, a courtship dance from the Sulu islands in which women in flowing robes vie for a man's affection.

Two of the best known and most successful Filipino folk-dance troupes are the Bayanihan National Folk Dance Company, which first wowed the world in 1958 at the Brussels Universal Exposition, and the Ramon Obusan Folkloric Group, founded in 1972. Both are resident companies of the Cultural Center of the Philippines.

Many Filipino ballet talents have won international recognition abroad, among them Maniya Barredo, former prima ballerina of the Atlanta Ballet, and Lisa Macuja, who played Giselle with the Kirov Ballet in Russia. Macuja now runs her own ballet company, Ballet Manila.

SPORT

First introduced by the American colonial administration as part of a program to Americanise the locals, basketball has blossomed into a national obsession. Most midsized towns have at least one concrete court with a corrugated-iron roof. You'll find at least a crude interpretation of a court in even the poorest, most remote barangays. The Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) is overwhelmingly popular. Most teams, which are named after sponsors rather than towns, feature one or two former US college stars.

The other big spectator sport is 9-ball billiards, thanks to the international success of Efren 'Bata' ('The Kid') Reyes, one of the country's few bona fide contemporary sports stars.

The Philippines' slim hopes for Olympic glory usually ride on the diminutive shoulders of its lightweight and featherweight boxers. When super-featherweight fighter Manny Pacquiao takes the ring, the entire country comes to a standstill. The fast-paced game of *jai alai*, or *pelota*, which comes from the Basque region of Spain, is also popular. Badminton is big and getting bigger. Manila's privileged class prefer playing polo or golfing at one of the many world-class courses around Manila.

The three-touch rule in volleyball was instituted because Filipino players used to lull the other team to sleep by passing only to each other.

FOWL PLAY

Cockfighting is to the Philippines what baseball is to the USA or rugby is to New Zealand. You'll see cockfights on TV but the only way to truly understand the Filipino passion for the sport is to go see it for yourself.

Before each fight, the noise level rises to a crescendo as bets are screamed out to middlemen in a scene reminiscent of a stock exchange. A hush falls over the crowd as the clash begins. The birds, fitted with lethal three-inch ankle blades, wander around aimlessly for a few moments before being reminded by their handlers that there's an adversary in the vicinity. The actual fight, once it finally begins, is short and brutal. The winner is whisked away to a team of waiting surgeons, who stitch up any gaping wounds and dose the bird with antibiotics. The loser usually makes his way into the cooking pot.

Western tourists can – and often do – complain about the practice ad nauseam, but they don't get much sympathy from Filipinos, who just smile and wonder what all the fuss is about.

Food & Drink

Filipinos love to eat – so much so that you could be excused for thinking that that’s all Filipinos ever do. Traditionally, a typical Filipino day comprises up to five meals: breakfast, morning *meryenda*, lunch, afternoon *meryenda* and dinner. *Meryenda* literally means ‘snack’, but don’t let that fool you – the afternoon *meryenda* can include something as filling as *bihon* (fried rice sticks) or *goto* (Filipino congee) plus an assortment of rice cakes.

Indigenous (or Pinoy) food is normally laid out on the table like a buffet, allowing the diners either to partake of one dish at a time or all the dishes at once. Western palates might find the everyday food a bit too rich and heavy (that’s the Spanish influence), but you can always request something light and healthy like *sinigáng na sugpo* (prawns and vegetables cooked in tamarind-flavoured soup).

Filipino cooking is a mixture of Malay, Spanish and Chinese influences blended with typical Filipino creativity and *joie de vivre*. If well prepared, this cuisine can be really delicious. Unfortunately, as is the case with similar food in Malaysia and Indonesia, much of what is on offer in *carinderia* (cafeterias) or *туру-туру* (literally ‘point-point’, as you point at your selection from the dishes on display) is prepared well in advance, and is cold by the time it’s eaten, which can detract significantly from its flavour. One way to cope with this, of course, is to ask that your selection be heated up, and most places will happily oblige.

STAPLES & SPECIALITIES

Travelling around the Philippines can be a culinary adventure, especially for those in search of something exotic. Regional specialities are a real treat, and can be full of surprises. In Manila you can sample practically any type of regional cooking, but there’s really nothing like savouring the delicacies in their place of origin. *Tocino* (honey-cured pork) and *longganiza* (sausages), two of Pampanga’s specialities, somehow taste better when sampled amid the province’s cultural heritage. Likewise, Bicolano cuisine, which is distinguished by a spicy creaminess (from a mixture of coconut milk and chillies) tastes especially good in the shadow of towering Mt Mayon. *Laing* (taro leaves simmered in spiced coconut milk) and Bicol *expres* (a fiery pork dish) are two Bicolano dishes that are a feast of flavours.

The names of dishes are often constituted by generic terms: *adobo* means the pork and/or chicken has been stewed in vinegar and garlic; *sinigáng* signifies the meat, fish or prawns have been boiled in a sour soup; *ginataan* means the meat, fish or vegetables have been cooked in coconut milk; *kinilaw* or *kilawin* is fresh seafood marinated in vinegar or *calamansi* (a type of citrus) juice, and spices; and *inihaw* refers to grilled meat or fish. See p48 for more details on food terminology.

The Philippines abounds with all kinds of goodies from the sea – snapper, grouper, tuna, mussels, clams, oysters, crabs and more. Many restaurants specialise in fish and seafood; ask your waiter to have your selection simply grilled and served with freshly squeezed *calamansi* juice, and you can look forward to a memorable gastronomic treat.

The bad news for lovers of animals (and vitamins) is that Filipino dishes tend to be long on meat and short on greens. Popular entrées include *kaldereta* (also spelt *caldereta*; meat stew), *apritada* (also spelled

The Food of the Philippines
by Filipino food guru
Reynaldo Alejandro is an
excellent introduction to
Filipino cooking.

afritada, *apretada* or *afretada*; pork or chicken in a tomato-based sauce) and *crispy pata* (deep-fried pork hock or knuckles). *Ihaw-ihaw* eateries (which serve the Filipino version of grilled meat and seafood) are everywhere.

One of the few vegetable dishes to make a regular appearance is *pinakbet*, a tasty melange of pumpkin, string beans, eggplant, okra and other veggies, seasoned with garlic, onions, ginger, tomatoes, shrimp paste and, sometimes, coconut milk. For more on eating vegetarian in the Philippines, see p48.

If you find that you aren't getting enough vegetables while travelling in the Philippines, one solution is to buy fruit, and vegetables like carrots and cucumber, at the many excellent street markets. Self-catering is certainly cheap, and fruit and vegetables come in an astonishing variety, all at very affordable prices. You can also buy fresh fruit and vegetables at the many supermarkets in the cities.

For dessert (or any time), try *halu-halo*, an ever-popular choice. It consists of a tall glass packed with fruit preserves, sweet corn, young coconut and various tropical delights topped with milky crushed ice, a dollop of crème caramel and a hearty scoop of ice cream. For health reasons, ice cream from street vendors is probably best avoided, but local brands like Magnolia and Selecta are quite good.

DRINKS

Nonalcoholic Drinks

It's not a good idea to drink tap water in the Philippines; stick to bottled, boiled or purified water. The water-refilling stations scattered all over the country are safe and an environmentally friendly alternative to disposing of empty water bottles. Many accommodation options have built-in kitchenettes where you can boil your own water.

Tea is served in Chinese restaurants; elsewhere, soft drinks rule. *Buko* juice is young coconut juice with bits of translucent coconut meat floating in it. It's usually sold in the nut, but you'd best stick to the type that comes in a presealed cup or bottle; *buko* juice is said to be good for staving off dehydration. *Guayabano* (soursop) juice is sweet and surprisingly refreshing. The popular little local citrus known as *calamansi* or *kalamansi* is used to make a refreshing cordial or added to black tea. Wondrous curative powers are ascribed to it, so take a sip and see what happens.

TRAVEL YOUR TASTEBUDS

The Philippines is a good place for culinary daredevils. If you're after a few good 'been there, tried that' stories, the Philippines is sure to satisfy. Some of the more challenging Filipino culinary treats include *balut*, a boiled duck egg containing an embryo that sometimes already has down or feathers. Strictly for non-pet owners, *aso* or *asusena* (dog-meat stew) is said to be tastier than any other red meat, though we can only report this based on hearsay. Likewise, the white meat of *bayawak* (monitor lizard) is a prized delicacy, but you will most probably have to get drunk first on *lambanog* (rough coconut wine; see opposite) in order to be able to stomach the idea of biting into some reptilian meat. Beetles, fried or floating in soup, and steamed tree-ant nests are two other gastronomic specialities found in the Philippines, though these have become quite rare, perhaps because of the drastic drop in beetle and ant populations from pollution and habitat loss. The same is true for frogs and freshwater snails. Finally, if you are really hankering for something out of the ordinary, you could dig into a nice helping of *bopis*. An item on the menu of many eateries specialising in Filipino food, *bopis* is made of pig's lungs, chopped and stir-fried. Quite tasty, really, once you get over your initial feeling of revulsion.

The Philippine mango was listed as the world's sweetest fruit by the Guinness Book of Records in 1955.

Alcoholic Drinks

At around P16 to P30 a bottle, San Miguel must be one of the world's cheapest beers – and it's not bad, either. These days, 'San Mig' has stiff competition from other domestic brews and a variety of imports like Carlsberg; in response, San Miguel Light (a low-calorie beer) was launched with heavy fanfare in 2000.

Palatable brandies, whiskies and gins are produced domestically; Tanduay Rum is a perfectly drinkable travelling companion (P20 to P30 for a 375mL bottle) – and a handy antiseptic! Rural concoctions include *basi*, a sweet, portlike wine made from sugar cane juice. *Tuba* is a strong palm wine extracted from coconut flowers; in its roughly distilled form it's called *lambanog*. Local firewater packs quite a punch – your stomach (if not your head) will thank you in the morning if you partake of the *pulutan* (small snacks) always served with alcohol.

CELEBRATIONS

Each village, town and city in the Philippines has its own fiesta, usually celebrated on the feast day of its patron saint, as determined by the Catholic calendar. In the old days, when life was easier and commodities were cheaper, every household was expected to prepare food and serve it to anybody who appeared at the door. Nowadays, food is still prepared but on a greatly diminished scale, and only people who have been invited show up at the buffet table. The fare on such occasions can vary from region to region, but generally it consists of pork, beef and chicken dishes, sometimes with some fish and seafood thrown in.

Kaldereta (beef or sometimes goat-meat stew), *igado* (stir-fried pork liver) and fried chicken are some of the dishes one can expect to find at a fiesta. Sweet rice-cakes, usually local delicacies, are served as dessert. Birthdays and other private parties, on the other hand, are usually celebrated with a big plate of *pansit* (fried noodles), though nowadays they have been widely replaced by the ubiquitous spaghetti, the local version of which will strike most Westerners as being unduly sweet. A birthday cake and ice cream are a must, especially when it's a children's party.

WHERE TO EAT & DRINK

The basic Filipino eatery is a *туру-туру*, where customers can order by pointing at the precooked food on display, but Filipino restaurants come in many guises, from small roadside canteens to huge enterprises like the popular Gerry's Grill (p102) in Manila. Ordinary restaurants and food stalls might be alright for a while, but it's definitely worth trying well-prepared, authentic Filipino cuisine in one of the pricier places.

If it's foreign cuisine you're after, in Manila you'll find almost everything under the sun. Other big cities, such as Cebu, also have a good smattering of foreign restaurants. Likewise, many resorts usually serve a variety of foreign favourites, with widely varying degrees of success.

American and local fast-food outfits occupy many city street corners, and offer an inexpensive array of Western fast food, from burgers to spaghetti and pizza. If you want to try the local version of hamburgers, spaghetti and fried chicken, step into a Jollibee outlet; it's a home-grown Filipino fast-food chain that has practically taken over the entire country.

Quick Eats

Unlike other places in Southeast Asia, where you can get a complete meal from street vendors, in the Philippines the wheeled food carts you see on the street usually offer snacks mainly intended for schoolchildren. Fish

There are over 400 Jollibee restaurants in the Philippines.

or squid balls are popular, usually fried on the cart in a wok of boiling oil and served on a bamboo skewer. The customer has a choice of two or three types of dips, almost all vinegar-based, with one spicy concoction. Also available from ambulant vendors are *balut* (carried in a basket) and a sweet bean-curd snack known locally as *taho* (carried in an aluminium container). Around the business centre in Makati, one occasionally finds parked vans selling ready-to-eat food in plastic bags, but this is a fairly new trend intended for office workers and found nowhere else in the country.

VEGETARIANS & VEGANS

If you are vegetarian or vegan, you'll have a hard time of it in the meat-mad Philippines, and you may even want to consider bringing some food products from home. It's hard to find soy-based products outside of places like Manila, where Chinese merchants and restaurants sell tofu, soy milk and so on. Beans in general don't figure prominently on the menu in the Philippines. Thus getting adequate and quality protein can be tricky. If you feel that this is going to be a problem, then it would be wise to stock up on these products before leaving Manila or Cebu.

Fortunately, excellent fruits and vegetables are widely available in the Philippines, and every village has at least one stand with colourful wares on display. Likewise, most *туру-туру* places offer at least one non-meat option, usually some version of stir-fried vegetables (although you can't always be sure what the vegetables were fried in, or if the dish does not contain small bits of meat). In larger villages and cities, you'll also find small shops that sell bread, cereals, milk etc. And, of course, when you get to a bigger city like Manila, Cebu or Puerto Princesa, you'll find actual supermarkets which carry a wide range of foods. Again, if you're setting off for the hinterlands or small islands, it's a good idea to stock up before hitting the road.

If you eat fish and eggs, you'll have no problem getting adequate protein in the Philippines. Almost all restaurants serve some sort of fish dish, and the catch of the day is often the main dinner course in the islands. Eggs are widely available (as you would guess from that almost inescapable feature of the Philippines – the morning chorus of roosters).

EATING WITH KIDS

Filipinos love children and it's not usually a problem to bring even very young children into restaurants. You won't find too much in the way of special children's menus, child seats and the like, but you will certainly come across cooperative waiters and restaurant owners. For more on travelling with children in the Philippines, see p435.

HABITS & CUSTOMS

An everyday meal in the Philippines is a fairly informal occasion, though it can take on the trappings of a formal Western-style dinner in the houses of the rich. Generally Filipinos eat with a fork and a spoon (no knife) – a fact that most visitors may find a little hard to get used to. When eating, most Filipinos sit in Western-style chairs (not on the floor, as is the custom in some other parts of Asia) around a table.

EAT YOUR WORDS

The following words and phrases should be more than sufficient to keep you well fed in the Philippines. For a menu decoder see p473, and for other useful Filipino words and phrases, see the Language chapter (p465).

Filipino Cuisine by Gerry Gelle and Michael O'Shaughnessy is a comprehensive overview of Filipino dishes and cooking.

Useful Phrases

I'm a vegetarian.
I don't eat meat.
Do you have any fish?
What's good?
Please bring...
How much?
Is a service charge included?
Until what time are you open?

Ako ay bedyetarian.
Hindi ako kumakain ng karné.
May isda ba kayo?
Anong masarap?
Pakidala ang...
Magkano?
Kasama na ba ang serbisyo sa tsit?
Hanggang anong oras kayo bukas?

Food Glossary

BASICS

bread *tinapay*
breakfast *almusal/agahan*
butter *mantikilya*
cheese *keso*
coconut milk *gatá*
coffee *kapé*
cooking oil *mantiká*
dinner *hapunan*
eggs *itlog*
flour *arina*
fork *tinidor*
glass *baso*
honey *pulut-pukyutan*
knife *kutsilyo*
lunch *tanghalian*
milk (fresh) *(sariwang) gatas*
plate *plato*
rice (cooked) *kanin*
rice (uncooked) *bigás*
salt *asin*
serviette/napkin *serbilyeta*
snack *meriyenda*
spoon *kutsara*
sugar *asukal*

MEAT & POULTRY

beef *(karnéng) baka*
chicken *manok*
duck *pato*
goat meat *(karnéng) kambing*
ham *hamón*
meat *karné*
pork *(karnéng) baboy*
venison *(karnéng) usá*

SEAFOOD

catfish *hito*
clams *tulyá*
crabs *alimango* (large, thick shelled)
alimasag (spotted, thin shelled)
talangká (small river crabs)
fish *isda*
lobster *uláng*

Dekalb University's SEASite Project's Filipino site has a brilliant online Filipino food glossary at www.seasite.niu.edu/Tagalog/filipino_food_glossary.htm.

milkfish
mussels
oysters
shrimp

VEGETABLES

bean sprouts
beans
bitter melon
cabbage
cassava/manioc
chilli leaves
eggplant
lima beans
okra
potatoes
radish
spinach-like vegetable
squash
string beans
sweet potatoes
tomatoes
vegetables

FRUIT

avocado
banana
cantaloupe
custard apple
fruit
grapefruit
lime
lime (local)
mandarin
mango
orange (local)
papaya/pawpaw
pineapple
plum (local)

bangus
tahong
talabá
hipon

togè
bataw
ampalayá
repolyo
kamoteng kahoy
dahon ng siling
talong
patani
okra
patatas
labanos
kangkóng
kalabasa
sitaw
kamote
kamatis
gulay

abokado
saging
milón
atis
frutas or prutas
suhá
dayap
calamansi
dalanghita
mangga
dalandán
papaya
pinýá
sinigwélas

star apple
watermelon

SPICES & CONDIMENTS

anchovy sauce
fish sauce
garlic
ginger
pepper
saffron
salt
shrimp paste
small hot chilli
soy sauce
sugar
vinegar

DRINKS

beer
boiled water
cocoa
coffee
cold water
(cup of) tea
ginger tea
hot water
juice
lemonade
mineral water
orange drink
soft drink
water
with/without ice
with/without milk
with/without sugar

kaimitò
pakwán

bagoong
patis
bawang
luya
pamintá
kasubhá
asin
bagoong alamáng
siling labuyò
toyò
asukal
suká

serbesa
pinakuluáng tubig
kokwa
kapé
malamig na tubig
(isáng) tsaá
salabát
mainit na tubig
juice
limonada
mineral water
orens juice
sopdrink
tubig
may/waláng yelo
may/waláng gatas
may/waláng asukal

Go to www.filipinorecipe.com for an excellent range of recipes for Filipino dishes, as well as a good food glossary and a Filipino cooking forum.

Asia Recipe's Filipino section at www.asiarecipe.com/philippines.html offers a comprehensive listing of Filipino recipes, along with some fascinating essays on Philippine cuisine in the light of traditional customs and folklore.

DOS & DON'TS

The rules of dining etiquette in the Philippines are pretty similar to those of most Western countries. They include:

- Don't speak when your mouth is full.
- Don't spit bones etc onto the table or floor.
- Don't fill your plate with more than you can eat.
- Use a serving spoon, not your personal spoon, to help yourself to the dishes.
- Don't make sounds with your mouth when chewing.
- If you must pick your teeth, cover your mouth with your hand.
- Be attentive to other people at the table.

Environment

THE LAND

The Philippines stretches some 1900km from north to south, and spans around 1110km from east to west. Two main islands and one island group – Luzon, the Visayas and Mindanao – divide the country into north, central and southern regions respectively, though Filipinos tend to use 'southern Philippines' to cover anything beyond the Bicol region.

The Philippines is comprised of 7107 islands, and the largest islands are Luzon (105,000 sq km), Mindanao (95,000 sq km), Samar (13,100 sq km), Negros (12,700 sq km), Palawan (11,800 sq km), Panay (11,500 sq km), Mindoro (9700 sq km), Leyte (7214 sq km), Cebu (4400 sq km) and Bohol (3900 sq km).

Some geologists believe the Philippine islands rose from the sea in a massive volcanic eruption, one of many in the Pacific Ocean's 'Ring of Fire' volcanic region. Most scientists, however, favour the idea that the islands are the tips of a long-submerged land bridge that once allowed for a hell of a hike from China to Australia via Borneo, Indonesia and New Guinea.

Mountains cover a total area of about 300,000 sq km, with most ranges inland on the three main island groups. Peaks range from around 1000m to almost 3000m in height; while Mt Apo (2954m) in Mindanao is the country's highest summit, the country's most commanding and best-known mountain is Mt Mayon in the Bicol region.

Limestone caves are found on many of the islands, with the best known being the Subterranean River in Sabang, Palawan; the caves around Sagada in the Cordillera, North Luzon; and the Callao Caves in the Cagayan Valley, North Luzon.

WILDLIFE

The Philippines is one of the earth's 'biodiversity hot spots', with an estimated 13,500 plant species, 1100 land vertebrate species (over 550 of which are birds) and some 500 species of coral. Perhaps more impressive is the number of species found only in the Philippines – some 3200 plant species, over 100 mammal species, and at least 170 bird species.

Animals

The best-known Philippine member of the bird family is the *haribon* (Philippine eagle), said to be the world's largest eagle; only about 100 survive in their natural habitat on the island of Mindanao. Further south, the Sulu hornbill of Sulu, Jolo and Tawi-Tawi is an amazing and elusive mountain-dwelling bird. The Palawan peacock pheasant is a remarkable bird: the males of this species have a metallic blue crest, long white eyebrows and large metallic blue or purple 'eyes' on the tail. Nearing endangered status, these ground-dwellers are found only in the deepest forests of Palawan.

Of the reptile family, Southeast Asia travellers will be most familiar with the gravity-defying, mosquito-chomping gecko and its raspy 'tap tap tap' mating call. More elusive scaled beasts include the sailfin dragon and the flying lizard – discovered by national hero José Rizal while he was exiled in Dapitan on Mindanao – and a wide variety of venomous and nonvenomous snakes, including pythons and sea snakes.

The Philippines is said to still be home to the sea cow, or dugong (known locally as the *duyong*), once found in great numbers in Philippine waters but now rare. You're more likely to spot dolphins, whales and, if

your timing's just right, the magnificent whale shark (known to some locals as *butanding*) near Donsol in Sorsogon (p194).

Plants

While the pretty yellow-flowered *nara* is the national tree of the Philippines, the unofficial national plant must surely be the nipa palm, which lends its name and leaves (used as wall and roof material) to the traditional nipa hut found all over the country. The national flower of the Philippines is the *sampaguita*, a variety of jasmine. The orchid could also stake a claim as the country's national flower, with some 900 stunning endemic species, including the *waling waling* (*Vanda sanderiana*) of Mindanao and the red-spotted star orchid (*Ranthera mautiana*).

Introduced crop species include tobacco and corn. One crop unique to the Philippines is the *pili* nut, which is sold in the form of cakes and sweets, ice cream and even soap. It's harvested from May to October, mostly around Sorsogon in South Luzon. *Abaca*, a native hemp plant used to make rope, is harvested in huge quantities in Mindanao. This island is also famous for its durian, a fruit as smelly as it is popular. And on the lovely little island of Guimaras, off Panay, rich red soil produces what many swear are the sweetest mangoes in the world.

Endangered Species

Huge numbers of the Philippines' animal and plant species are in danger of extinction. Of the Philippines' animal species, 47 are critically endangered, 44 are endangered and 103 are vulnerable. Thirty-seven plant species are critically endangered, 28 are endangered and 128 are vulnerable. The **Haribon Foundation** (www.haribon.org.ph) provides information on endangered species in the Philippines and the foundation's efforts to protect them.

NATIONAL PARKS

There are estimated to be 62 national parks in the Philippines (some governmental agencies list as few as 59 and others as many as 72). In addition to national parks, there are also seven wildlife sanctuaries. The first national park was established in the Philippines in 1932. Unfortunately, it is estimated that only seven of the Philippines' national parks would actually satisfy international criteria for a true national park. In most Philippines national parks there are human habitations, sometimes extensive, and many of the parks are subject to cultivation, logging or fishing. Despite this, some of the areas designated as national parks in the Philippines do contain some stunning tracts of wilderness and natural scenery, and they are certainly well worth visiting. The following are some of the more interesting of the Philippines national parks.

At 476,588 hectares, **Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park** in Luzon is the Philippines' largest protected area, equivalent to 50% of the country's remaining primary forest. For information on this area see p178.

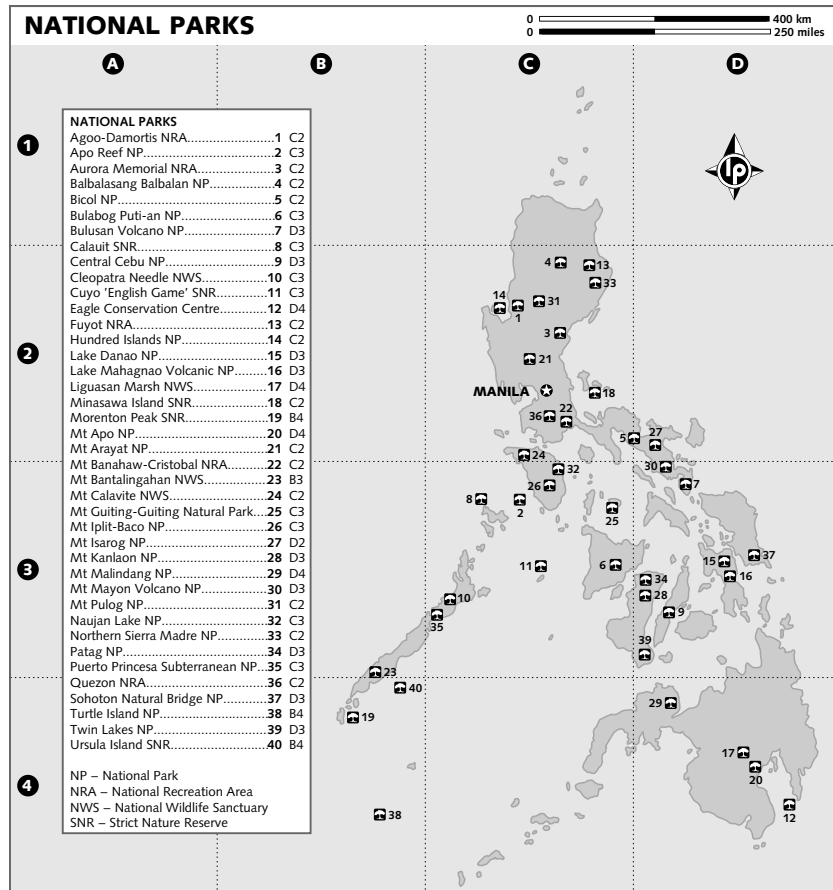
Mt Isarog National Park in Luzon is home to Mt Isarog (1966m), the presently dormant second-highest volcano in Bicol (southeast Luzon). The park and the volcano are one and the same, as Mt Isarog stands on its own. Malabsay Falls, near the park's entrance, is a popular picnic spot for city dwellers. For details on hiking here see p189.

One of the last remaining grazing patches for the indigenous *tamaraw* (*Bubalus mindorensis*), **Mt Iglit-Baco National Park** (Mindoro) is vital for the survival of this critically endangered cousin of the water buffalo, which, along with the local indigenous Mangyan people, has been threatened by the steady reduction in grasslands caused by farmers encroaching on the

Get to know more about the Philippines' rich biodiversity and its vanishing species at the Philippine Department of Environment & Natural Resources (DENR) site at www.psdn.org.ph/nbsap/main.html.

Check out Conservation International's biodiversity-hot-spot information on the Philippines at www.biodiversityhotspots.org/xp/Hotspots/philippines.

The world's biggest pearl was found by a Filipino diver in the waters off Palawan in 1934. It weighed over 6kg and was valued at US\$42 million.



area. There are also many other endemic species in the park. See p222 for information on visiting this park.

Mt Guiting-Guiting Natural Park (Sibuyan Island), a mountainous 16,000-hectare forest in the Romblon group of islands, is a rare slice of living history and one of the finest natural wonders in Asia. For thousands of years the spectacular slopes of 2058m-high Mt Guiting-Guiting have nurtured and protected a world that would have long ago been destroyed by human activity if not for its isolation. Geologically and biologically, Sibuyan Island is a relic from the ice age. Several quite bizarre species of fruit bats, more than 100 known bird species and large macaques live among the ancient teak trees of the park. Some species are found nowhere else in the world. For more details see p343.

The beauty of **Coron Island** lies in the fact that it was left alone for so long. Managed properly, the island's virgin forests, pristine lakes and stunning cliffs should stay just as they are. An ancestral domain of the native Tagbanua tribe, the island is best accessed from nearby Busuanga Island. For details on Coron Island, see p430.

The **El Nido Marine Reserve** encompasses the islands of the Bacuit Archipelago, off of the northwest coast of Palawan. A wonderland of jagged cliffs (both above and below sea level), hidden lagoons and secret beaches, the reserve is one of the most lovely seascapes in the Philippines. For more details see p424.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Land

Before 1900, about two-thirds of the Philippines was covered with dense primary rainforest. Now, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' *State of the World's Forests 2005* report, around 24% of the Philippines is forested, and only a small percentage of this area is true primary forest. Furthermore, only 11% of the Philippines' total forest area is classified as protected, while 75% is classified as production forest. More alarmingly, the rate of deforestation is high: between 2000 and 2005, the Philippines lost an estimated 7870 sq km of total forest area. Although this last figure may seem relatively small, the forest in question is some of the last primary rainforest in Southeast Asia, and is home to an astonishing variety of plant and animal species.

Environmentalists have noted bitterly that much of what's left of Philippine forests is too high up for loggers to be bothered with, or it's scrappy secondary forest yet to be eaten up by the ravenous Integrated Forest Management Agreements (IFMA, formerly the Timber License Agreements) that have allowed most of the damage.

This modern disaster has been caused by unregulated logging, massive farming expansion and a migrating lowland population. Throughout the 20th century, indigenous people's claims on upland regions were ignored and rich resources were plundered by a powerful elite. Poor lowland communities headed for the hills, often to jobs clearing land, and the indigenous residents were pushed onto less and less fertile land.

In 1998, 100,000 families on Mindanao faced eviction from their small-scale farms to give way to the palm-oil industry of Malaysia. Around the same time, families from the indigenous Manobo groups were forced to evacuate their traditional homeland and flee to Davao City due to regular military operations in the area. Despite having an officially recognised ancestral domain claim on the area, the Manobo people found themselves at the centre of a bitter land dispute with the timber company Alcantara & Sons, who the government had allowed to commercially log there.

The battle to save what's left of the upland forests has begun with indigenous land-rights claims and new conservation policies, but there's still huge pressure on the government from both domestic and foreign land interests. The Department of Environment & Natural Resources (DENR), the environmental arm of the government, is entrusted with the task of wrenching the country's resources out of corporate hands and into community-based projects. Respect for ancestral domain rights and forest boundaries is seen as integral in the fight to retain what's left of Philippine forests.

Various attempts to rejuvenate degraded forests have been plagued by poor management and the effects of unchecked introduced species, and in some cases degraded forests have simply been degraded further. New strategies for these areas include localised sustainable management programmes, natural resource mapping and (at long last) taking the advice of indigenous experts.

Of course, the Philippines isn't alone in its tendency to talk rather than act when it comes to halting such degradation. Nor is it the only nation with a long history of exploitation by outside forces.

Saving the Earth: The Philippine Experience (ed Cecile CA Balgos) is a compilation of investigative reports on the environment of the Philippines, all previously published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Rich in mineral, timber and marine resources, the Philippines has been beaten, raped and robbed as brutally as any developing nation on earth. As recently as 1995, a mining act was amended to effectively encourage the destruction of rich wildlife and tribal areas such as those around Sipalay and Hinoba-an (Negros province). It's a testament to the land and its people that so much pristine natural beauty is still intact.

Sea

With a coastal ecosystem stretching almost 20,000km, the Philippines is one of the earliest victims of rising global ocean levels and temperatures.

Centuries-old coral is dying almost overnight and it's no longer just divers in remote spots who are witnessing this poorly understood phenomenon. Snorkellers in tourist haunts around Puerto Galera (Mindoro) and Boracay (Panay) can now see for themselves what a coral graveyard looks like.

In mid-1999, regional marine science studies grimly reported that increased sea temperatures were causing 'mass coral-bleaching events' in the world's best coral reefs. These studies indicate that unless something is done to reduce global warming, the Philippines' magnificent underwater world will be gone by around 2100 – along with Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

In the meantime, increasingly desperate fishing communities are robbing waters even of staple fish species. In many areas healthy coral reefs are being destroyed by dynamite, cyanide and chlorine fishing methods. Cyanide stuns fish so they can be caught live and sold for a higher price, but at the same time it kills the coral.

Its value as a marine nursery disastrously underestimated, the mangrove ecosystem that once supported ocean life on the Philippine coast has more than halved since it was first monitored in 1918. Of the remaining mangrove ecosystems, around 65% are in Palawan. An estimated 95% of the country's commercial saltwater fishponds are converted mangrove forest.

Equally underestimated is seagrass, which once sustained huge numbers of vegetarian marine creatures such as turtles, sea urchins and dugongs. Seagrass also shielded smaller organisms from predators, produced oxygen, regulated salinity levels, filtered impurities and stabilised the sea bed. Vast swathes of this stuff have gone the same way as the old-growth mangrove.

Environmental Activism

It's certainly not all bad news on the Philippine environmental front. The country's many environmental groups are passionate and vocal, and numerous local governments have put their weight behind the establishment of marine and wildlife reserves, and have actively campaigned against destructive mining, development and energy projects.

The following websites contain information related to the environmental concerns facing the Philippines. Some are Philippines-specific, others address the problems in a worldwide context.

Coral Cay Conservation (CCC; www.coralcay.org) Works to protect coral reefs and other marine environments.

International Marinelife Alliance (IMA; www.marine.org) Includes information on sustaining the world's coral reefs.

Negros Forests & Ecological Foundation Inc (NFEF; www.nfeff.org) Works to protect various Philippine habitats, focusing on Negros.

One Ocean (www.oneocean.org) Works to protect and manage Philippine coastal areas.

Rainforest Action Network (RAN; www.ran.org) Provides excellent general information on rainforests and rainforest conservation, with information on the Philippines.

Silent Sentinels (www.abc.net.au/science/coral) Presents an Australian ABC science forum about coral and global warming.

The Philippines is reported to have the highest concentration of coral species of any country on earth; of the estimated 500 species of coral in the world, 488 are thought to be present in the Philippines.

The Green Guide (ed Howie G Severino) is an excellent source of information on Philippine environmental issues. It includes information about endangered species and government and nongovernment environmental organisations. It's published by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism.

Diving in the Philippines

Many of the Philippines' 7107 tropical islands, as one might expect, have superb diving offshore. Walls, canyons, wrecks and coral gardens too numerous to count beckon experienced divers and novices alike.

There are literally hundreds of dive centres dotted throughout the islands, and remote dive sites, such as the perennial Tubbataha and Apo Reefs, together with sea mounts and offshore reefs beyond count, complete the diving landscape and are visited by a variety of customised *bangka* (outrigger) 'safari boats' and live-aboards (boats that divers sleep on during dive trips; for more details on live-aboards, see p433).

The amazing diversity of marine life, large and small, dwarfs other popular diving destinations such as Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Divers who have travelled throughout the Asia Pacific region know that the Philippines is one of the world's best diving locations, with sites that will thrill even the most jaded of divers.

PRACTICALITIES

WHEN TO GO

Many parts of the country boast year-round diving, but the Philippines is affected by the annual cycles of the northeast and southwest monsoon winds that create a dry season (November to May), and a wet season (June to September), as well as by typhoons that visit the country periodically from June to January.

Dry Season

The northeast monsoon winds affect the country from November until April, dispelling much of the remaining rain. But while the sea state can be quite choppy and turbid during these months, many dive centres have alternative sites to visit if weather disturbances are affecting specific areas. November 15 is generally regarded as the start of the 'tourist season' by dive operators throughout the country. Christmas and New Year see most dive centres and resorts overflowing with divers, so reservations are recommended. The sea conditions improve throughout February, and by mid-March the sea is often flat, calm, and a brilliant azure, with incredible visibility that peaks during April and May in many areas.

Wet Season

The southwest monsoon winds usually start to blow around the end of April, often bringing a welcome 'April shower' or two, but the first rains usually appear by early to mid-June as the winds start blowing; the rain gradually builds up from an hour or so's worth a day to major tropical downpours that can last for days. While this can cause lowered visibility, the nature of many of the diving areas is such that there are usually sheltered spots in the lee of the prevailing winds that afford reasonable diving and adequate visibility.

Remote live-aboard and safari diving is not recommended, and is rarely offered from July through to November in most parts of the country. In some areas, such as Boracay, many dive operators close down until October or November. In many other parts of the country, dive centres remain open year round and offer complete dive services to visitors.

Diving & Snorkeling Philippines, published by Lonely Planet, is a great, detailed guide to the dive sites of the Philippines. It neatly supplements the information in this book and can be purchased at <http://shop.lonelyplanet.com>.

SAFETY GUIDELINES

Before embarking on a scuba-diving, skin-diving or snorkelling trip, carefully following the points below will help ensure a safe and enjoyable experience.

- Possess a current diving certification card from a recognised scuba-diving instructional agency (if scuba diving).
- Be sure you are healthy and feel comfortable diving.
- Obtain reliable information from a reputable local dive operation about physical and environmental conditions at the dive site.
- Be aware of local laws, regulations and etiquette about marine life and the environment.
- Dive only at sites within your realm of experience; where possible, engage the services of a competent, professionally trained dive instructor or dive master.
- Be aware that underwater conditions vary significantly from one region, or even site, to another. Seasonal changes can significantly alter any site and dive conditions. These differences influence the way divers dress for a dive and what diving techniques they use.
- Ask about the environmental characteristics that can affect your diving and how locally trained divers deal with these considerations.

The Philippines is also affected by typhoons that influence weather conditions throughout the islands during much of the wet season. The Pacific eastern coast is battered hard by approaching typhoons, which explains why most of the country's dive centres are located further to the west. Typically, the later in the season a typhoon strikes, the stronger it is likely to be.

WHAT TO BRING

Dive centres these days are typically well stocked with a wide variety of well-maintained and reasonably new rental equipment. Technical divers will find what they need at dive centres offering technical diving, including reels and accessories, mixed gas and, in many cases, rebreathers. Many operators also sell equipment, and most internationally recognised brands can be bought and serviced throughout the islands.

CERTIFICATION

All dive centres in the Philippines require that a diver be certified by a recognised international training agency, and many operators will also ask to see a log book to assess a diver's experience. Most live-aboard trips require at least an advanced certification, but the good news is that training is both widely available and great value throughout the country. Whether you are an entry-level scuba diver looking to learn with a professional dive centre or an experienced technical diver seeking to become an instructor trainer, the Philippines is an excellent place both to learn to dive and for ongoing training. The industry leaders, the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), account for the majority of dive certifications issued in the Philippines, and there are many PADI-accredited dive centres and dive resorts covering the full range of affiliate statuses, usually a good indication that a dive centre follows high safety, ethical and professional standards. Other training agencies are also well represented throughout the country. Among them are the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI), Scuba Schools International (SSI), Confédération Mondiale Des Activités Subaquatiques (CMAS), Scuba Diving International (SDI), Technical Diving International (TDI),

For a comprehensive list of dive centres in the Philippines, do a search on www.dive-centers.net.

American Nitrox Divers International (ANDI) and the International Association of Nitrox and Technical Divers (IANTD).

Courses

The complete range of courses from entry level to instructor are widely available with regular Instructor Development (ID) and Instructor Evaluation (IE) courses held throughout the country. The Philippines is an excellent place to consider doing a dive-master internship. From December to May, many dive centres in places such as Puerto Galera and throughout the Visayas have the necessary stream of divers, both students and certified, that a dive-master trainee requires to fulfil the course requirements in a timely way.

As mentioned earlier, technical diving is big throughout the Philippines, and there is no shortage of deeper sites for technical training. Some live-aboards also offer technical diving, mixed gas and rebreather equipment and training on request to qualified divers.

DIVE SITES

Divers of all levels will find challenges and adventure aplenty throughout the Philippines. Whether you are more comfortable diving on a shallow coral garden or are looking for deep technical dives, the Philippines is one of the world's best diving destinations. It has a profusion of wrecks, walls and reefs, many teeming with marine life ranging from tiny, unique nudibranchs (sea slugs) to giant whale sharks and everything in between.

The diving environment can often be deceptive. Clear water and great visibility can lead to disorientation and going below the planned depth easily. Currents can be a major factor on many dives, and the sea conditions and weather can change in a matter of minutes at certain times of the year, from flat, calm and sunny to big waves, wind and rain.

To get the most out of your diving experience and to avoid unnecessary risk, it is strongly advised that you dive with a local dive operator that displays a high degree of professionalism. A PADI affiliation can be a good indication of a dive operation's commitment to safety and customer service. In addition, check out an operator's safety procedures and emergency plans. Ask if the operator has oxygen, if it is brought along on dive boats, and if there are personnel that are trained to administer it on board too. Take a look at the rental equipment: is it relatively new and well maintained? Are the classrooms equipped with audiovisual aids? And finally, as there are hundreds of international dive professionals working throughout the country, find one that speaks a language you are comfortable with.

The following dive-site descriptions represent just a few of the hundreds of sites that are visited regularly by divers throughout the Philippines.

LUZON & AROUND

Luzon, the main island of the country, is home to the capital, Manila. It is also home to the capital of scuba diving in the country, Anilao (p123), in Batangas province, where many Manila-based divers make their first training dives. Anilao is busy most weekends with city-dwelling enthusiasts, as it is a convenient two-hour drive from Manila. Accordingly, you can often negotiate a good deal if you're diving in Anilao during the week. Most diving in Anilao, as with much of the rest of the country, is done from outrigger bangka boats.

Tanikalang Ginto has a fantastic selection of Philippine dive websites at www.filipinolinks.com/Sports/Diving.

The Philippines has the highest density of coral species (488) of any country in the world.

The most famous dive site in Anilao, and arguably in the country, is Cathedral Rock, a marine sanctuary just offshore from Dive 7000 Resort. The site is populated by thousands of persistent reef fish who are used to being hand-fed and swarm fearlessly around divers looking for handouts. The bottom here descends below 30m, but most of the action takes place at around 20m or less.

Nearby Sombrero Island presents a cavalcade of crevices and coral- and gorgonian-covered boulders which attract pelagics (open sea marine life) such as rainbow runners and yellowtails. Maximum depth here is 27m.

Other Anilao sites include Maimit, a steep rocky reef festooned with hard and soft corals to 35m; Caban Cove, a relatively shallow (25m) sheltered site that is prone to currents, and the Hot Springs (21m), a unique site that has volcanically heated water seeping from cracks in the seafloor, attracting several species of shark, ray and the ubiquitous frogfish.

On the west coast of Luzon, Matabungkay (p119) is a good jump-off spot to dive Fortune Island with its coral-festooned drop-off, home to pelagics, reef fish and sharks. A bat cave can be entered through an underwater tunnel on the west side.

EMERGENCY

The Philippines is not a centralised country: by default, most of the emergency contact numbers tend to be local. In many instances you're better served by coordination with local baryo, barangay, police, military and hospitals. Your dive operator should have an effective emergency plan and be able to make the necessary arrangements should you find yourself in need of assistance. If this is not the case, the following information may be useful in arranging evacuation and medical treatment. You'll also find local emergency numbers in the Information sections of regional chapters of this book.

Recompression Chambers

There are five recompression chambers in the Philippines, but air-evacuation options are limited and transport times can be lengthy. For this reason it pays to dive conservatively in the Philippines.

Never arrive at a recompression chamber without calling first. You can save valuable time if the chamber staff can assist with transportation or refer you to another facility when their chamber is in use.

Batangas (☎ 043-723 7098; Batangas Hyperbaric Medicine and Wound Healing Center, St Patrick's Hospital Medical Center, Lopez Jaena St, Batangas City, Luzon) Contact: Michael Perez, MD.

Cavite (☎ 046-524 2061, ask for Sangley operator and request local 4490, 4191 or 4193; Sangley Recompression Chamber, Philippine Fleet, Naval Base Cavite, Sangley Point, Cavite City, Luzon) Contact: Capt Pablo Acacio.

Cebu City (☎ 032-232 2464-8, local 3369; Viscom Station Hospital, Camp Lapu Lapu, Lahug, Cebu City) Contact: Mamerto Ortega or Macario Mercado.

Manila (☎ 02-920 7183, 921 1801, local 8991 or 6445; Armed Forces of the Philippines Medical Center, V Luna Rd, Quezon City) Contact: Jojo Bernado, MD, or Fred C Martinez.

Subic (☎ 047-252 7052, 252 7566; Subic Bay Freeport Zone, SBMA, Olongapo City, Zambales) Contact: Lito Roque.

Evacuation Services

Both the Philippine Air Force and private operators such as Subic Seaplanes can assist with evacuations. However, their range is limited and you can't expect them to miraculously appear in the middle of places like the Sulu Sea.

Philippines Air Force Search & Rescue (☎ 02-854 6701, 853 5013, 853 5008; Villamor Air Base, Pasay City, Manila)

Subic Seaplanes (☎ 047-252 2230, 0919 325 1106; Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Zambales)

The former US Naval Base of Subic Bay (p130), in Zambales province, has several wrecks to dive including the impressive USS *New York* (p131), which rests at 28m in the harbour on its port side. The wreck is penetrable, but this is a huge ship and it is easy to get fatally lost in the endless corridors and passageways, so appropriate training and an experienced guide are vital. Other wrecks in the harbour include the *Oryuku Maru*, or 'Hell Ship', in which 1600 US prisoners of war were imprisoned and mistakenly killed during an air attack, the *El Capitan*, a well-preserved site favoured by photographers for its general intactness, penetrability and prolific marine life, and the *San Quintin* (16m), home to larger fish such as wrasse, tangs, glasseyes and sweetlips.

Along the west coast heading north there are a number of sites that are less well served by dive operators, until you get to San Fernando and the Lingayen Gulf (p139) in La Union Province. Here, a huge coastal reef system, Research Reef, runs for over 3km along Bauang (White) Beach at a depth of between 2m and 28m. There are several other reefs in the nearby bays to the north, including VOA, a colourful coral garden with a white-sand bottom that give unusual clarity to the water. The Black and Red Buoys marking the entrance to San Fernando Harbour (they are marked on charts, but usually one or both is actually missing) are both great dives. They have caves and canyons, and whitetip and blacktip reef sharks at 22m to 30m.

Several kilometres offshore is the huge Fagg Reef, which is on the edge of the relatively shallow shelf of the Lingayen Gulf, and where the western-facing wall drops off to unfathomable depths. Current and decompression issues here are paramount, especially if planning to dive the three WWII vintage tanks resting on a ledge of the impressive wall at 40m. There is also a huge variety of marine life here.

Rounding out Luzon, we must mention Donsol (p194), in the south-eastern province of Bicol, where whale sharks can be found in the silty waters of Donsol Bay. The season for snorkelling with the sharks is very brief, from 1 February to 31 May.

MINDORO

The Spanish named Mindoro after a gold mine, but for divers, the most exciting treasure is under the water. Countless small harbours, coves and bays decorate an emerald-green coastline, overlooked by towering mountains. Beneath the water, coral-rich reefs are full of marine life of all shapes and sizes. Mindoro's sites are suitable for snorkellers and divers of all levels of training.

Puerto Galera (p205) is a major training centre, and there are over 20 professional dive operations along the three main beaches of Sabang (p210), Small La Laguna (p213) and Big La Laguna (p214). There are many other resorts tucked away in coves and on private beaches on both sides of the isthmus. The isthmus itself juts out into the Verde Island Passage, and consequently some of the sites, especially those off Escarceo (or Light-house) Point can experience unpredictable sea conditions and strong currents, so diving with an experienced local guide is an absolute necessity.

Popular sites around Puerto Galera include West Escarceo, Hole in the Wall, Shark Cave, Pink Wall and the Canyons, all of which are found on Escarceo Point, jutting out into the channel. Advanced certification is required for these dives. The sites are rich in marine life, with large pelagics, such as tuna and a variety of rays, jacks and reef sharks. Turtles are quite common here, and the Shark Cave (28m) usually has one or more sleeping whitetip reef sharks inside it. The advent of mixed gas

Donsol, in southeast Luzon, is one of the few places in the world where whale sharks are regularly sighted.

and rebreather diving, both of which are available in Puerto Galera, has opened amazing new possibilities for dive profiles around the Escarce Point sites, making this area very popular with technical divers.

Less challenging sites include the Manila and Batangas Channels leading into the main harbour, and numerous coral gardens and drop-offs such as Monkey Beach. A few wrecks can be dived, but the main attractions in this area are the corals and marine life.

Several kilometres to the east of Puerto Galera, Verde Island (p210) has some notable dive sites too, the most impressive being the Verde Island Wall. Reputedly one of the best wall dives in the Philippines, the almost sheer drop-off is resplendent with corals and marine life.

THE VISAYAS

The Visayas is comprised of numerous islands, large and small, encompassing some of the country's most exciting diving. Mactan Island (p242), the gateway to Cebu, has a long drop-off running along its eastern coast. The Marigondon Cave is an impressive cavern with a small cave at its rear that is home to a school of flashlight fish, whose bio-luminescent 'eyes' flash in the dark at divers that stick their heads into the small opening. Kon Tiki Reef is a well-preserved site just off the resort of the same name (p244). The wall here is festooned with corals and there are plenty of small reef fish to hold your attention.

On the island of Cebu, Moalboal (p255) is one of the oldest centres of diving in the country. The diving off the beach involves a quite spectacular drop-off that starts just off Panagsama Beach. Adjacent Pescador Island (p256) is most famous for its 'Spanish dancers'; colourful large nudibranchs. The Cathedral, a huge crevice that filters sunlight into brilliant shafts that dapple the interior down to 34m, is one of the island's most impressive sights.

To the east of Cebu lies Bohol (p261), where Alona Beach on Panglao Island (p265) at its southwestern tip is home to many dive operators and resorts. Sites visited from here, and with dive safaris departing from Cebu and other Visayan dive centres, include Cabilao Island (p269), most famous for hammerhead sharks that prowl its deeper regions, tempting divers to go beyond 40m. Don't. There's plenty more to see around Cabilao, including an outrageous coral reef at southwest Cabilao where whitetip and grey sharks, rays, barracuda and other pelagics can be seen along with Napoleon wrasse and many other species of reef fish.

Balicasag Island (p269), 45 minutes' boat ride from Alona Beach, is one of the best reef dives in the Visayas, which is really saying something. Balicasag's reefs are suitable for intermediate divers and experienced snorkellers. Dive with an experienced guide, and you will see all manner of amazing creatures, ranging from green turtles and bigeye trevally to all sorts of pelagics. The hard and soft coral growth in this marine sanctuary is very impressive. Along the northeast coast there's a site called Black Forest, named for the massive clumps of black coral found here.

Alona Beach itself has several excellent sites, including Arco Point, which bottoms out at 25m, and Kalipayan, a 20m drop-off.

To the west lies Apo Island (p281), a more remote destination with its own dive centre on the island. It's a stunning site with large fish and prolific corals almost everywhere.

To the north of Cebu lies Malapascua Island (p249), where a resident shoal of rare thresher sharks patrols the adjacent Monad Shoal at depths of around 40m. Other sites visited from Malapascua include Gato Island (p250), a marine sanctuary with a cave that bisects the island, in which

you are likely to encounter sleeping whitetip sharks and banded sea snakes. The wreck of the *Doña Marilyn* is home to nurse sharks and blotched rays, and is a site that lends itself to photography for its red and blue soft corals and variety of marine life.

Boracay (p325), in the northwestern part of the Visayas, is a popular beach destination in its own right, and also has several notable dive sites. The Yapak wall (p328) is an exciting, deep dive with visibility that can exceed 200m, and huge pelagic action. Remember though, that you are about as far away from a recompression chamber here as you could be anywhere in the Philippines.

MINDANAO & SULU

Mindanao is the second-largest island in the Philippines, and, despite being known for its religious and political unrest, is also home to some excellent diving. On the south side, Davao (p387), particularly Samal Island (p391), has been a popular dive destination for several decades; the Ligid Caves remaining a highlight. Other sites around Samal include Pinnacle Point, with its pink corals and a cracked wall down to 35m; Pindawon Wall, a 40m-plus drop-off with some lively cabbage coral colonies surrounded by spectacular table corals and clumps of black coral; and the Malipano Japanese wrecks at around 40m. Although the low current has restricted marine growth on the wrecks, this is a good technical dive site. The two ships are lying 40m apart and can be visited on one dive by an advanced scuba diver with appropriate training.

General Santos (or 'Gen San'; p393) is home to a couple of dive centres and an extremely impressive drop-off that stretches for over 10km along the coastline. Tinoto Wall is characterised by an expansive, flat reeftop with a profusion of coral gardens. The currents can be enormous, and they bring with them a staggering array of huge pelagics, including mantas, several species of shark, barracuda, rainbow runners and tuna. Napoleon wrasse, grouper and bumphead parrot fish top the bill of the huge cast of reef fish present, and the deeper you go, the bigger they get.

Off the central north coast of Mindanao, Camiguin Island (p378) bears reminders of its volcanic origins and more recent tectonic events at dive sites such as Agutaya Reef, in the shadow of the Hibok-Hibok volcano.

Jigdup Shoal is a sea mount that rises from the deep sea floor to the surface, and is one of the best sites in the region. There is a fantastic parade of pelagic and reef fish to be observed on the sprawling 10-hectare reef. For snorkellers, and divers looking for a less challenging site, Cabuan Point is a delightful option with plenty of shallow areas where cuttlefish, angelfish, tangs and parrotfish vie for attention.

The Sulu Islands (p403) that stretch away to the southwest of Mindanao do have some impressive diving, but due to the sensitive social and political environment they are rarely visited by any but the most ardent divers, and then usually only by those with military connections.

PALAWAN

The long finger of Palawan points to some great diving whichever way you look at it. Coron Bay in the north, with its sunken Japanese WWII fleet, is a must-see for wreck-diving enthusiasts. For more on wreck diving around Coron, see the boxed text on p430. Aside from wreck diving there are some outstanding coral reefs that often get overlooked in all the excitement, as well as a unique trek up a cliff face to dive in an inland lake. Significant thermoclines (layers with distinct differences in water temperature) and haloclines (layers of salt and fresh water) reward the

Coral Reef Fishes: Indo-Pacific and Caribbean by Ewald Lieske and Robert Myers is a useful guide to reef fish found in Philippine waters.

Some of the world's best wreck diving can be found near Coron, in Palawan.

diver here, and while the marine life in the lake is fairly unspectacular, the scenery above the water is magnificent.

The Bacuit Archipelago (p424) in northern Palawan has several outstanding dive sites. Typified by steep walls and exquisite coral gardens, the diving around this sheltered bay is rewarding for its diversity and colour. The most frequently visited site is probably Dilumacad, due to its proximity to populated areas. For an impressive wall dive to 35m and beyond, it's hard to top Inambuyod Boulders, where the strong currents attract large pelagics and encourage lush gorgonian fan corals. Miniloc Island (p426) is a popular training site and features sheltered, year-round diving. Look for a colony of blue ribbon eels here.

The capital of Palawan, Puerto Princesa (p410), has some great diving nearby, notably in Honda Bay (p414) to the north. The bay is affected by the amihan (northeast) winds from July to January, but throughout the rest of the year, colourful sites such as Henry's Reef, Helen's Reef, Verano Rocks and East Pandan Reef, none of which are deeper than 18m, offer great opportunities.

Puerto Princesa is the main jump-off point for live-aboards visiting the three remote reef systems of Tubbataha, Jessie Beazley and Basterra. Tubbataha, lying east of Palawan in the middle of the Sulu Sea, is a twin-atoll reef system with stunning walls surrounding shallow reef systems. Mantas and whale sharks, and the full gamut of pelagic marine life, are the main attraction at all three of these Sulu Sea sites. While the weather allows only a short diving season, it is also the area's best ally against the depredations of commercial and illegal fishing that have ruined many other remote reefs throughout the region. Tubbataha and its sister Sulu Sea sites are ranked among the finest in the world, and represent the pinnacle of diving excellence in the Philippines.

Dive Right Coron's website at www.coronwrecks.com has detailed information about the wrecks of Coron.

RESPONSIBLE DIVING

Please consider the following tips when diving and help preserve the ecology and beauty of the reefs:

- Never use anchors on the reef, and take care not to ground boats on coral.
- Avoid touching or standing on living marine organisms or dragging equipment across the reef. Polyps can be damaged by even the gentlest contact. If you must hold on to the reef, only touch exposed rock or dead coral.
- Be conscious of your fins. Even without contact, the surge from fin strokes near the reef can damage delicate organisms. Take care not to kick up clouds of sand, which can smother organisms.
- Practise and maintain proper buoyancy control. Major damage can be done by divers descending too fast and colliding with the reef.
- Take great care in underwater caves. Spend as little time in them as possible as your air bubbles may be caught within the roof and thereby leave organisms high and dry. Take turns to inspect the interior of a small cave.
- Resist the temptation to collect or buy corals or shells or to loot marine archaeological sites (mainly shipwrecks).
- Ensure that you take your rubbish and any other litter you may find away from dive sites. Plastics in particular are a serious threat to marine life.
- Do not feed fish.
- Minimise your disturbance of marine animals. Never ride on the backs of turtles.

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