

Mindoro



A rugged island cut in two by an almost impassable mountain range, Mindoro is part tropical paradise, part provincial backwater. The physical barrier of the High Rolling Mountains has led to the formation of two provinces on the island: Mindoro Oriental (east), and Mindoro Occidental (west).

Most of Mindoro's tourist industry is found on the north coast of Mindoro Oriental, in the resort towns around Puerto Galera. Here you'll find white-sand beaches, secluded coves and tropical hideaways in a stunning harbour. There is accommodation to suit everyone, from beach shacks to world-class resorts, and some of the Philippines' best diving around Sabang.

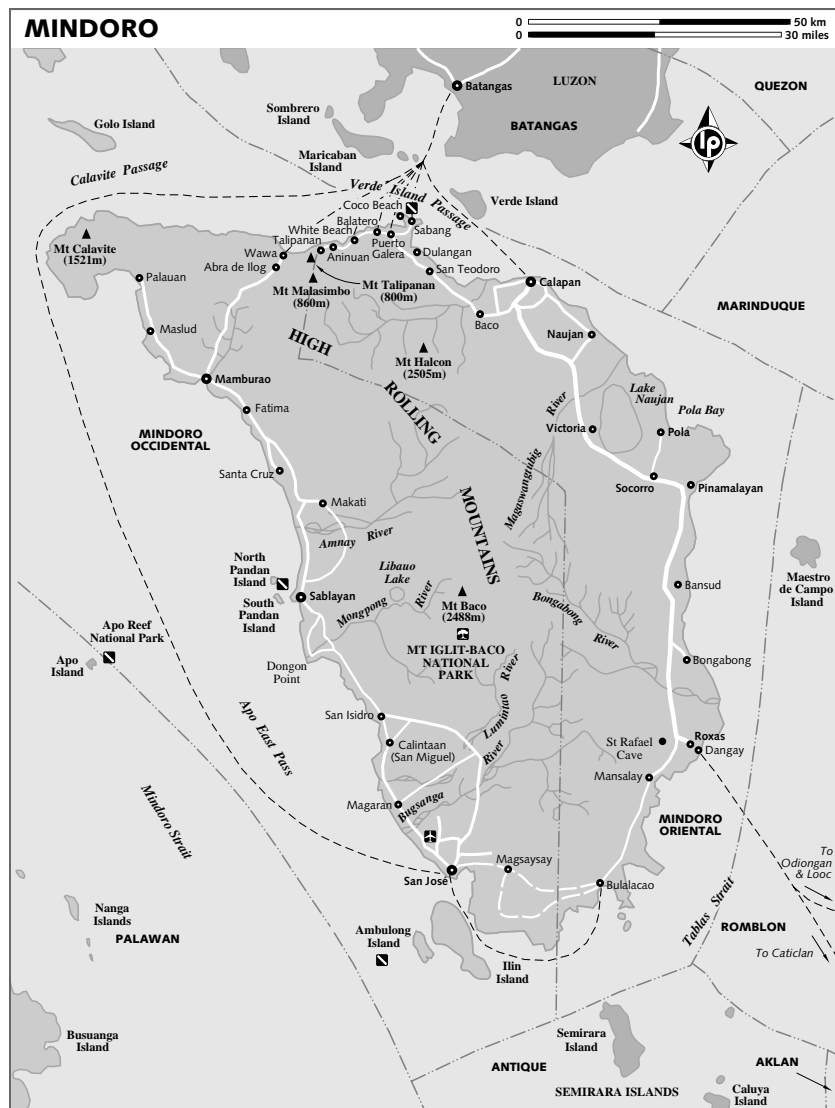
If you should tire of resort living, you only have to venture southeast of Puerto, or virtually anywhere in Mindoro Occidental, where it's possible to go for days – weeks – without seeing another foreigner. It's hard going, but if you can deal with the bad roads, the indifferent food, the dust and the grime, you will be rewarded with some unforgettable island hopping, hiking and mountain climbing – not to mention diving in pristine Apo Reef.

Despite its proximity to the main island of Luzon, Mindoro is one of the least developed places in the Philippines, which is evident from the state of its roads. Apart from the Calapan–Roxas highway, all roads are dirt and many are impassable in the wet season.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Getting in a boat and exploring the thousands of little coves and beaches of **Puerto Galera** (p205)
- Diving by day, partying by night at **Sabang** (p210), the granddaddy of dive resorts
- Treating yourself to a massage while the kids have a scuba lesson at **Coco Beach Resort** (p214)
- Getting back to nature on pristine **North Pandan Island** (p221), gateway to the marine reserve of Apo Reef
- Negotiating the hair-raising Knife Edge ridge walk when you climb **Mt Halcon** (p217)
- Volunteering for a head count of the critically endangered *tamaraw* (native buffalo) at **Mt Iglit-Baco National Park** (p222)
- Being the first person you know to island-hop the dive frontier of **Bulalacao** (p220)





Annoyances

Mindoro is prone to frequent brownouts (otherwise known as blackouts): bring a torch (and batteries).

The other annoyance here is a dodgy telephone service, which means drop-outs, congestion and frequently changed phone numbers.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Mindoro's only commercial airport is near San José, in little-travelled Mindoro Occidental. Tourists who fly here are almost invariably bound for North Pandan Island. Asian Spirit (% 491 4151, 02-855 3333 in Manila) flies once daily to/from Manila (P1600, 45 minutes).

BOAT

Unless you're chartering a plane or flying into San José, you will be coming to Mindoro by boat.

Luzon

The usual route to Mindoro is from Batangas, in southern Luzon, to Puerto Galera.

A convenient way to get from Manila to Puerto Galera (via Batangas) is by the combined air-con bus and boat services offered by competitors Si-Kat (% 0916 576 0405, 02-521 3344 in Manila; Citystate Tower Hotel) and Island Cruiser (% 523 8841, 0917 339 3373, 02-522 1515 in Manila; Lotus Garden Hotel). Both have booking desks in Manila and at Muelle pier in the township of Puerto Galera.

Both services depart from A Mabini St in Ermita, Manila at 8am: the Si-Kat bus from the Citystate Tower Hotel and the Island Cruiser bus from the Lotus Garden Hotel. They connect with pumpboats at Batangas at around 10.45am and arrive at Muelle pier at noon. Return trips depart from Muelle pier at 8am and arrive in Manila around 1pm. Si-Kat costs P500/1000 one way/return, and Island Cruiser P500/975.

For a little more trouble and less money, you can catch a bus independently from Manila to Batangas pier (see p124), then catch a pumpboat to Puerto Galera proper, Sabang or White Beach.

Pumpboats leave Batangas regularly during the day until around 4pm and you will find offices for all the main shipping lines at the pier. The lines are Super Diamond (% 0917 350 8121), with four to five daily services to Puerto Galera (P140, 1¼ hours); Datinguinoo (% 0917 361 0772), with six daily services to Sabang (P100, 1¼ hours); and Brian Shipping (% 0917 273 5070) and Golden Falcon (% 0918 518 2683), each with four to eight daily services to White Beach (P120, 1¼ hours).

There are also two car ferries, the Starlight Odyssey (% 043-723 9965) and the Montenegro Maria Kristina (% 043-723 8294), that sail from Batangas to Balatero pier (P130, two hours, three to four daily), about 3km west of Puerto Galera.

For details of boats from Batangas to Calapan, Abra de Ilog and San José, see the Getting There & Away sections under each of these destinations in this chapter.

Be careful when you get off the bus at the Batangas pier, as some travellers have been

scammed by touts who'll claim that the last boat to Mindoro has just left, hoping that you'll charter one of their small and rickety outriggers (for an outrageous P2500). Even if it's late in the day, check with the ticket offices in the terminal building before resorting to a special trip, as there are often late departures of passenger boats. Alternatively, you can take one of the frequent services to Calapan, which run later, and travel overland to Puerto Galera the next day.

There's a P10 terminal fee for all passengers leaving Batangas; pay at a booth in the terminal.

Panay

From Roxas there are regular, round-the-clock car ferries to Caticlan (P220, four hours), the entry point for Boracay; see p219 for details.

Romblon

A large pumpboat (P160, three hours) and a car ferry (P175, three hours) run one to two times daily from Roxas to Odiongan; see p219 for details.

MINDORO ORIENTAL

Of the two provinces on the island, Mindoro Oriental is by far the wealthier and more populous. Calapan is its administrative capital, but of most interest to visitors is the group of resort towns from Sabang to Talipanan, collectively referred to as Puerto Galera.

Southeast of Puerto it's mostly drab towns and black sand. Word has it, though, that resort owners have been buying up land in remote Bulalacao, on the southern tip of the island, which may just have the makings of a beach-and-diving resort.

PUERTO GALERA

% 043 / pop 21,925

The town of Puerto Galera (*pwair*-toe gal-air-ah) proper is centred on Muelle pier, a humble jetty flanked by a line of restobars and a couple of hotels. Business is not what it used to be since brash newcomers Sabang and White Beach got their own boat services, but even the most idle hotelier can take consolation from what remains one of the finest harbour views in the Philippines.

Puerto Galera is Spanish for 'Port of the Galleons'. Its deep natural harbour is sheltered on all sides, and was a favoured anchorage of ocean-going vessels centuries before the Spanish arrived in 1572. Yachties from all over the world are still drawn to Puerto, where, uncommonly for the Philippines, talk is more about what you can do above the water than beneath it.

Visitors be warned that Puerto is also a haven for foreign, alcoholic retirees, who are frequently indistinguishable from the yachties. With no nightlife on offer beyond sinking a few beers and watching a wall-mounted TV, this place is often fast asleep by 9pm.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police station (☎ 281 4043; Municipal Bldg, H Axalan St)

INTERNET ACCESS

Rucke's Internet Cafe (access road to Muelle pier; per hr P100) Fast broadband connection.

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.mypuertogalera.com

www.puertogalera.com The best of the Puerto websites, with maps, resort listings, events, transport prices and schedules.

www.travelpuertogalera.com

MAPS

Maps are available from the tourist office on Muelle pier for P100.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Dr Hubert Dolor (☎ 287 3049) Will make house calls. **Puerto Galera Hospital** (☎ 0920 920 6957) About 200m past the Petron service station, on the road to Calapan. Serious cases referred to Calapan or Batangas.

MONEY

The closest ATMs are in Calapan. **Candava Mini-mart** (P Concepcion St) Changes major currencies at competitive rates. **Allied Bank** (National Rd) Changes US dollars.

POST

Post office (E Brucal St) Next to the Hotel California.

TELEPHONE

John & Jayne's (access road to Muelle pier) Has international phones.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist office (☎ 287 3051; Muelle pier) Sells a tourist map and has a few pamphlets. Outside, there's a board with pumpboat fares.

Sights & Activities

There is a variety of trips and treks around the Puerto Galera area, some of which require guides (see p211).

At **Tamaraw Falls** (adult/child P10/5; ↷ 7am-5pm Mon-Fri, 7am-4pm Sat & Sun) cool mountain waters plummet 30m into a natural pool beside the road, run under a stone bridge into two constructed swimming pools, then flow out again into a jungle gorge.

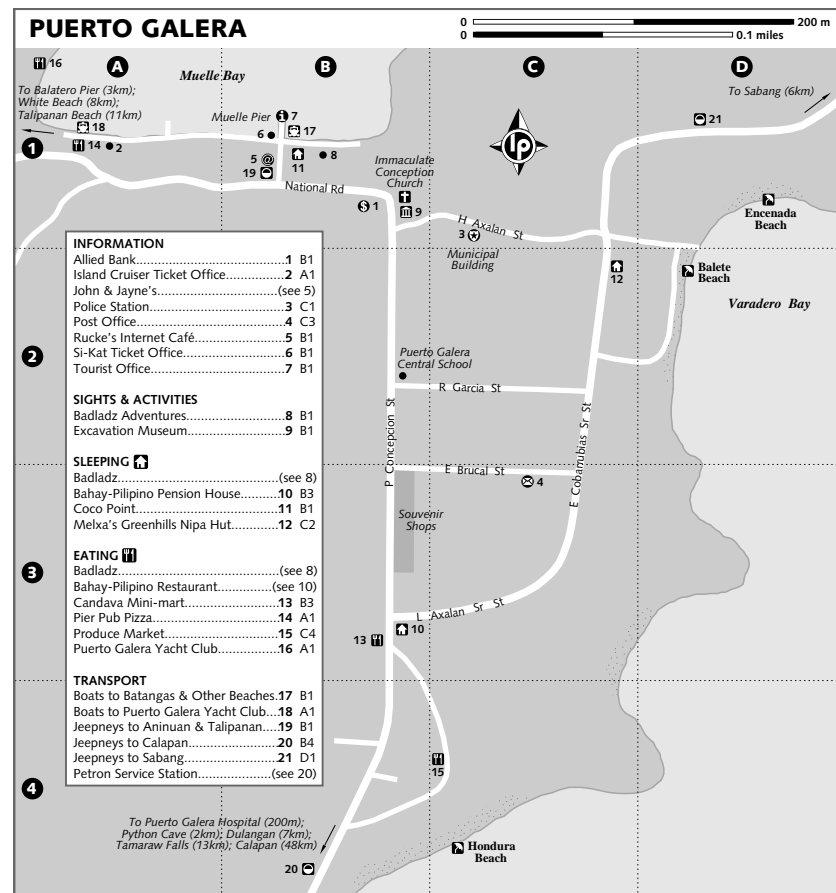
The Tamaraw Falls are popular on the weekend, especially on Sunday when admission is free, but during the week you can just about have them to yourself. Bring a packed lunch and enjoy the views; thatched shelters, perched on the edge of the pools, are available for picnicking. There are toilets, and a kiosk at the entrance selling snacks, soft drinks and beer.

The falls are 14km from Puerto Galera on the rough, mountainous road to Calapan – only the first 7km of which is paved. To get there, catch a Calapan-bound jeepney from near the Petron service station (P25, 40 minutes). Most tricycle drivers will do the trip only on a full-day charter basis, for which you'll pay at least P600.

About 3km out of town on the road to Tamaraw Falls, an unsignposted track winds 2km up to **Python Cave**. This cavern is said to be home to a 2m-long python. Jeepney drivers aren't likely to know the turn-off so keep an eye peeled; the ride should cost around P15. A tricycle from town will cost around P400 return, or you could add a couple of hundred and do it on the way to the falls.

Badladz Adventures (☎ 287 3184, 0919 577 2823; www.badladz.com) puts the *cojones* into Puerto Galera with scuba trips (P1000 including equipment), snorkelling trips (P400 including equipment), treks, motorbike rentals (P800 per day) and paintball (P1200/300 participants/nonparticipants) on secluded Boquete Beach. Paintball trips include food and drinks, use of snorkel and fins and a free T-shirt. There are discounts on most activities for guests of the resort.

Puerto Galera Yacht Club (☎ 442 0136, 0919 369 9721) can arrange sailing tuition and connect you with yachts for private charter. It holds



biannual regattas from 30 October to 1 November, and on the Easter weekend.

The **Excavation Museum** (P Concepcion St; admission by donation; ↷ 8-11.30am & 1.30-5pm Mon-Sat) is a humble, single-room museum with displays of ancient Chinese porcelain, Thai burial jars and Filipino pottery. Most pieces date back 500 to 1000 years; many were recovered from shipwrecks. The museum is inside the grounds of the Immaculate Conception Church.

Sleeping

The harbour front is where most people will want to base themselves.

Badladz (☎ 287 3184, 0919 577 2823; www.badladz.com; d with fan/air-con P500/800) With an unbeatable

position by the pier, activities galore and one of Puerto's better eateries (see p208), this is Puerto's best option. Rooms are plain but well kept, and all have cable TV. Some air-con rooms have views; fan rooms are closeted behind the main building.

Coco Point (☎ 442 0109; d without/with view P600/800) If you want a pier-side location, and can live without Badladz' cable TV and air-con, these pleasant, rattan-lined rooms will appeal. Breezy room No 7 looks straight out over the water.

Melxa's Greenhills Nipa Hut (☎ 0919 430 6739; E Cobarrubias Sr St; apt with balcony & view P700, q without view P400) On a hill in town overlooking Balete Beach, there is no nipa to be found here. A beachside annexe contains four rudimentary

ground-floor quads, and one very basic, 1st-storey apartment. The apartment has killer views and is cooled by sea breezes. There are discounts for longer stays.

Bahay-Pilipino Pension House (☎ 442 0266; P Concepcion St; s/d P250/350) If saving money is your priority, Bahay-Pilipino has plain rooms with fans and a shared bathroom, as well as an average restaurant. A shared balcony overlooks dusty P Concepcion St.

Fishermen's Cove Italian Restaurant & Resort (Map p209; ☎ 0917 533 2985; cottages with fan, hot shower, full board per person P3300) About 1km west of Puerto Galera, Fishermen's Cove comes with a secluded beach and pretty nipa huts. The main attraction, though, is three fine Italian meals a day, including handmade pasta.

Eating

The little restobars along the pier offer relaxed dining with great views. We've selected a number of options.

Badladz (☎ 287 3184, 0919 577 2823; www.badladz.com; meals P120-200) North American-owned Badladz does some of the tastiest Mexican in Mindoro.

Pier Pub Pizza (pizzas P270-360) PPP goes for a trattoria feel, with painted wooden beams and checked tablecloths. It has thick, fruity pancakes (P90) and surprisingly good pizza.

Puerto Galera Yacht Club (☎ 442 0136, 0919 369 9721; seafood & steaks P250-400) Hidden in the trees to the west of the pier, this place offers something a little different. A free shuttle boat service (8am to 9pm Saturday to Thursday, 8am till late Friday) from the front of Pier Pub Pizza ships you there and back. The food is average, but if you're in town on a Friday night and in the mood for a drink, get on down to the uproarious, end-of-week barbecue/booze-up.

Bahay-Pilipino Restaurant (☎ 442 0266; P Concepcion St; meals P150-250) The house specialties are Swiss and German sausages. Other dishes are nothing to write home about.

Candava Mini-mart (P Concepcion St) Well stocked with groceries, including imported food.

Produce market (7am-noon Mon-Sat) This can be found 100m up the side street south-east of Bahay-Pilipino Pension House.

Getting There & Away

JEEPNEY & TRICYCLE

Jeepneys leave when full for Sabang from the northeastern end of town (P15). Tricy-

cles cost around P150. The road is unpaved and frequently impassable in wet weather.

Jeepneys en route to Aninuan and Talipanan beaches leave from just near the pier and cost P15 (20 minutes). Tricycle drivers will ask P150 for a special trip to Talipanan, or P100 to White Beach. Jeepneys to Calapan cost P50 (two hours) and leave from outside the Petron service station at the southern end of P Concepcion St.

A jeepney/tricycle to Balatero pier costs P5/20.

BOAT

There are many services between Puerto Galera, and Batangas on Luzon. See p205.

Pumpboats can be hired for trips to/from Sabang (P250), Small La Laguna (P220), Big La Laguna (P200), White Beach (P500), Talipanan (P600) and a host of other destinations.

If you want to head to Abra de Ilog (Mindoro Occidental) from Puerto Galera, there's no road. Depending on which beach you depart from, a chartered pumpboat to Abra's pier at Wawa will cost you P1500 to P1800 (1½ to two hours). A cheaper, less direct option is to go to Batangas and catch a passenger boat to Wawa (see p220).

NORTH COAST RESORTS

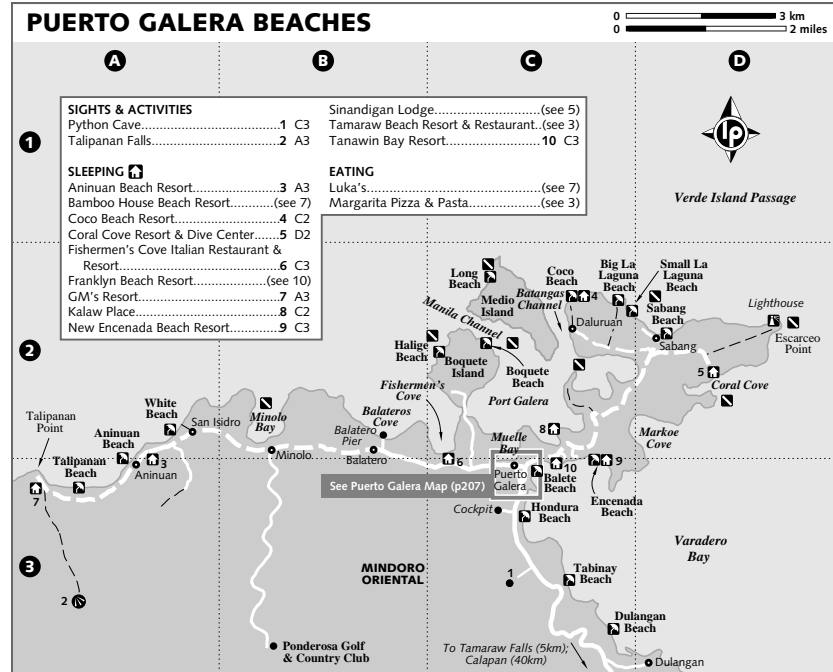
The resort towns around Puerto Galera each have their own particular characteristics. Sabang is the biggest, the brashest, the smelliest and the seediest. You wouldn't swim off Sabang's beach. Small La Laguna's beach is much less suspect, as are the majority of its inhabitants – from Small La Laguna, a stroll to Sabang feels like you're slumming it. Big La Laguna is misleadingly named – in tourist numbers and facilities it is dwarfed by 'Small' La Laguna. It has the cleanest beach of the three resort towns, but not a lot else besides.

Lovers of quiet would do well to consider the secluded resorts on the road from Puerto to Sabang.

Budget travellers and a great many Filipinos from Luzon gather at White Beach, while those looking for something more peaceful and remote head further west for Aninuan and Talipanan.

Puerto Galera to Sabang

About 1km from Puerto Galera on the road to Sabang, there is a choice bunch of tran-



quil and secluded resorts, all with wonderful views. Most offer low-season discounts of up to 25%. The fare from Puerto Galera is around P10/50 by jeepney/tricycle.

New Encenada Beach Resort (☎ 524 0861; www.encenada.com; d with fan/air-con incl breakfast from P1600/1900) Set on a private white-sand beach, Encenada's features include convivial hosts, a pool table, a bar, a dining deck that overlooks the beach and a dive centre. The downside is boxy rooms decorated in garish nautical themes – but then who wants to hang out in the hotel room?

Kalaw Place (☎ 0917 532 2617; www.kalawplace.com.ph; fax 442 0209; d with fan & hot shower P1600, annex apt with fan, hot shower & kitchenette P2500) This supremely tasteful native-style villa is situated on what is probably the most glorious lookout in Puerto Galera. As well as the main house there are a couple of apartment-style annexes. A wonderful place to relax and devour that novel. Book well in advance.

Tanawin Bay Resort (☎ 0916 221 9647; www.tanawinbayresort.com; d with fan from 1600, with air-con & private balcony from P2100; ☎) Straddling a ridge high over Balet Beach, the Tanawin is the

most 'international' of the resorts north of Puerto. The stylish stone-and-thatch design includes such architectural delights as the Snail House and the Circle House – not a right angle in sight.

Franklyn Beach Resort (☎ 287 3182; www.franklynresort.com; d with fan & bathroom from P1000, serviced apt with kitchenette per month P15,000; ☎) Franklyn suffers a little in comparison with the other resorts, but it still has comfortable, nipa-style rooms that command great views, and you can negotiate good discounts on longer stays.

Southeast of Sabang, the two secluded resorts of Coral Cove and Sinandigan look out to Verde Island. (There is also a private manor here, which is one of the most grandiose tropical properties we've seen.)

Coral Cove Resort & Dive Center (☎ 287 3220, 0920 229 1815; www.coral-cove.com; d with hot shower from US\$21; ☎) Further along the road, and southeast of Sabang, isolated Coral Cove Resort has neat, comfortable rooms and a small private beach. Dive trips are a speciality, and staff will pick you up for free from Sabang or Puerto Galera.

Sinandigan Lodge (☎ 0919 607 0345; d with fan/air-con P950/1250) Located behind the Coral Cove Resort, this place lacks views and atmosphere. On the upside, rooms are clean and well kept, and air-con rooms have cable TV. Guests tend to dive with Coral Cove Dive Center.

Sabang

Sabang's beach front is jammed with hotels, restaurants and dive centres. Behind these is a fully fledged town, which is the reason it's so much rowdier (and more polluted) here than at Small and Big La Laguna. Still, Sabang retains one or two peaceful patches of paradise, particularly at the eastern end of the beach.

INFORMATION

Internet Access

CJ Trading (per hr P120, international calls per min P50; 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, 1-10pm Sun) Fast satellite connection.

McRom's Bar & Sizzling House (8am-2am) Free Internet access with a meal (an edible cheeseburger is P90), otherwise P1 per minute.

Laundry

Laundromat (per kilo P45; 8am-8pm) A few doors up from Relax Thai Restaurant.

Medical Services

Metro Palitan Medical Clinic (☎ 287 3156, 0917 563 0011; behind Seashore Lodge) On call 24 hours. Offers first aid, medical clearances for diving, treatment of STDs.

Money

There are many moneychangers in Sabang, but no ATMs.

Filipino Travel Center (☎ 287 3108) Will make cash advances on credit cards (7.5% commission) and change travellers cheques. Can also book flights and tours.

ACTIVITIES

Diving

Diving is king in Sabang. Ever since Ferdinand Marcos declared the reefs around Sabang a marine reserve in 1973, word has spread about the great diving here. Favoured sites include the Hole in the Wall, Verde Island and the four wrecks in Sabang Bay. Diving is possible year-round, though seas can get rough from June to September.

The usual price for a single dive with all equipment included is around US\$20 to US\$25; it's cheaper if you have your own equipment or book a number of dives. Most of the dive centres in Sabang offer PADI-approved courses – typically, an open-water course will set you back US\$300 to US\$350. A range of courses for more experienced divers is also available.

If you're not into diving, it's still worth hiring a snorkel set for the day (around P200) to check out the coral in the area. Long Beach used to be the favoured haunt of snorkellers, but this reef suffered from the effects of coral bleaching in 1988. However, there are plenty of other sites with healthy coral to choose from – ask for advice at one of the dive centres.

The following three operators, in Sabang and Small La Laguna, offer a superior mix of five-star PADI dive centres and great accommodation packages.

Asia Divers (Map p213; ☎ 287 3205, 0917 814 5107; www.asiadivers.com; Small La Laguna) Associated with El Gallean Beach Resort.

Diving Philippines (☎ 287 3134; www.diving-philippines.com; Sabang) Associated with Atlantis Beach Resort.

Sabang Inn Dive Resort (☎ 287 3193; www.sabang-inn.com; Sabang)

There are plenty of other dive centres in Sabang and surrounding beaches, all offering dive/accommodation packages. They include:

Action Divers (☎ 287 3320; www.actiondivers.com; Sabang)

Capt'n Gregg's (☎ 287 3070; www.captngreggs.com; Sabang)

La Laguna Beach Club (Map p213; ☎ 287 3181; www.llbc.com.ph; Big La Laguna)

New Encenada Beach Resort (Map p209; ☎ 524 0861; www.encenada.com; Encenada Beach)

Octopus Divers (☎ 0917 562 0214; www.octopusdivers.org; Sabang)

Rudy's Dive Center (Map p213; ☎ 0919 391 6399; www.rudysdivecenter.com; Small La Laguna)

South Sea Divers (☎ 287 3052; www.southseadivers.com; Sabang)

Tropicana Divers (☎ 287 3075; Sabang)

Trekking

From Sergio's rooms behind his sister Tina's guesthouse, Sergio's Tours (☎ 0915 991 4789) offers day trips including food and transport to places such as Tamaraw Falls (P1000),

some local Mangyan villages (P1000) and a nearby river for kayaking (P1800 to P2000). We're not sure what he's alluding to, but Sergio's card promises 'Only the right and true information', which is a big relief.

Tarzan Trek Tours (☎ 287 3314) offers the same tours at the same prices as Sergio.

SLEEPING

There's no shortage of accommodation in Sabang, but the best places go fast. Book early if you wish to avoid the one thing every diver fears most: a cramped, airless dive.

Rates drop dramatically in the low season (May to September): expect discounts of up to 50%. In the peak seasons of Easter, Christmas and New Year, prices can go skyward.

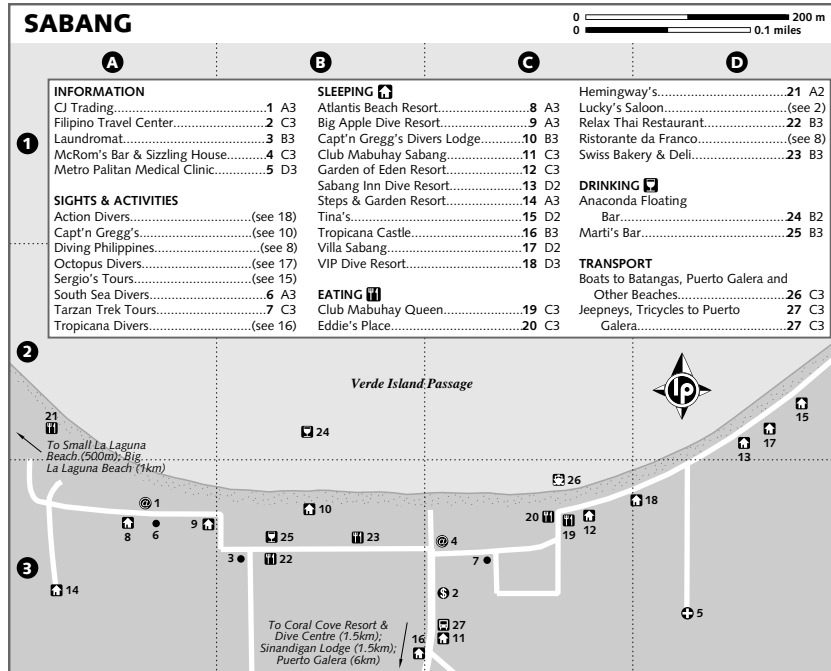
Sabang Inn Dive Resort (☎ 287 3198; www.sabang-inn.com; d with fan/air-con from US\$19/26; s) Away from the crowds, Sabang Inn has spacious rooms, great views and friendly staff. There's a five-star PADI dive centre here offering good package deals. Rates stay the same year-round.

Villa Sabang (☎ 0917 562 0214; www.villa-sabang.com; d with fan P1000, apt with kitchenette & cable TV P1900; a s) The Villa has family-friendly apartments and huge, plain, powder-blue rooms. At its heart is a shady courtyard with views across a large pool to the sea. It also has a restaurant, pool tables and bar. Octopus Divers is based here.

Capt'n Gregg's Divers Lodge (☎ 287 3070-1, 0917 540 4570; www.captngreggs.com; d with hot shower, cable TV & fan/air-con P800/1200) Right on the beach, this is a Sabang institution. The rooms, which look out over the water, are great value and rates stay the same most of the year. It also has a well-regarded dive centre and a popular restaurant (see p212).

Atlantis Resort Hotel (☎ 287 3066-69, 0917 562 0294; www.atlantishotel.com; d with minibar, cable TV & hot shower from US\$55; a s) The grand old dame of Sabang, Spanish mission-style Atlantis has the town's priciest restaurant (Ristorante da Franco), an idyllic terraced garden with a pool and a state-of-the-art five-star PADI dive centre. It's worth paying extra for your room, as the cheaper ones are quite poky.

Tropicana Castle (☎ 287 3075; paultropicana@yahoo.com; d with minibar, hot shower & cable TV from P1500; a s) This place has a bizarre, EuroDisney thing going on – it looks like a giant jumping castle. Rooms have four-poster



beds, faux-antique furniture and marble bathrooms. It's worth forking out a little more for the suites. A truly incongruous, crazy-fun kind of place.

Big Apple Dive Resort (☎ 287 3134; www.dive-bigapple.com; cottage with cable TV, bathroom & fan/air-con P950/1750; Ⓢ) One of the main players in Sabang, Big Apple starts at the beach and stretches a long way back. The place includes a five-star PADI dive centre, a restaurant and a popular bar.

Garden of Eden Resort (☎ 287 3096; cdiver@vasia.com; d with bathroom & fan/air-con P1500/1900; Ⓢ) Comprises a deep block with uniform rows of comfy cottages. The grounds surrounding the pool and bar are apparently styled like the Garden of Eden – hence the name.

VIP Dive Resort (☎ 0917 795 9062; d with bathroom & fan from P400) A good budget choice, VIP has rooms behind Action Divers. Rates stay the same year-round, and dive and accommodation packages are available.

Tina's (☎ 287 3139; d with fan/air-con from P800/1200) A relaxed and friendly guesthouse at the quiet eastern end of Sabang Beach. It has no-frills cottages, some with good views.

Steps & Garden Resort (☎ 287 3063, 0919 861 4363; stepsgardenresort@yahoo.com; d with bathroom & fan/air-con P850/1250) If dive resorts are not your bag, Steps is a great choice. Cute cottages with thatched roofs and stone floors are set among beautiful, sloping gardens. To get here, take the narrow, well-signposted path off the western end of the main path.

Club Mabuhay Sabang (☎ 287 3097; www.clubmabuhay.com; d with air-con, TV & hot shower from US\$36; Ⓢ) This Korean-owned, white stucco compound just off the main drag has motel-style accommodation. Consider it only if the other resorts are booked up. Rates stay the same year-round.

On the stretch of shoreline between Garden of Eden Resort and the eastern point of Sabang beach, you will find no end of concrete pillbox guesthouses (d with fan/air-con from P600/1000), some with balconies looking out to sea. All accept walk-in guests.

EATING

Hemingway's (meals P300-350; ⌚ 7am-11pm) No one comes to Sabang for the food, but if all the restaurants were as good as Hemingway's that might change. It occupies a quiet and lovely spot at the western end of the beach and has a mouth-watering selec-

tion of Spanish and Caribbean dishes, such as Jamaican jerk chicken (P300) and blue marlin creole (P330). And yes, it *is* a clean, well-lit place.

Relax Thai Restaurant (curries from P210; ⌚ 11am-10pm) Its location in the heart of Sabang's covered lane gives Relax Thai an exotic bazaar vibe. Authentic Thai décor and a whiff of incense maximise the effect. There's a whole page of vegetarian dishes, and the food is a passably good imitation of the real thing.

Swiss Bakery & Deli (sandwiches around P150; ⌚ 7am-11pm) Fresh crusty bread, imported cheeses and deli goods, great sandwiches and coffee. Go there for brunch.

Capt'n Gregg's Divers Lodge (www.captnregg.com) Capt'n Gregg's has a 2nd-floor open-air restaurant right on the water. The American breakfast (P150) is good value and there's a nightly barbecue. Big eaters might like to take up the 'Pizza Challenge': you have one hour to eat a 50cm pizza. Finish it and it's free; wimp out and you shout the bar.

Lucky's Saloon (meals from P200; ⌚ 11am-2am) A popular little upstairs bar and German restaurant, its menus are bound in *Lucky Luke* comic books.

Club Mabuhay Queen (breakfast from P120; ⌚ 7am-midnight) Right on the beach where the boats pull in, it has a great little eating area under the shade of a *talisy* tree. A morning *caffè latte* by the sea will cost you P75.

Eddie's Place (breakfast from P120, Filipino dishes from P200; ⌚ 24hr) Eddie's does the usual thing; its best asset is its central, beach-front location.

Ristorante da Franco (breakfast P220-400, Italian dishes from P450; ⌚ 7am-11pm) At the Atlantis Resort Hotel, this is Sabang's most exclusive restaurant. Great food is one thing, but given that it lacks a sea view and Sabang *is* a beach, we wonder how they can justify those prices.

DRINKING

Sabang certainly does not lack for bars, though there's not much to distinguish between them. Diver-oriented drinking holes dominate the scene, with a few 'exotic dancer' venues passing themselves off as discos.

Anaconda Floating Bar (⌚ 10am-6pm), moored 50m out from Capt'n Gregg's Divers Lodge, is the place to go if you really want to drink like a fish. Take plenty of protection against

the sun – you can almost smell the foreign flesh roasting. A free shuttle boat will take you there and back.

Marti's Bar (covered lane) is a chilled-out little lounge that's good for conversation. Happy hour is from 4pm to 7pm.

Our favourite watering hole, **The Point** (Map p213; ⌚ 10am-midnight), is technically in Small La Laguna (see p214).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Pumpboats pull up on the beach just east of the main road. For services from Batangas (Luzon), see p205.

To Puerto Galera, a jeepney/tricycle will cost P15/P150. A pumpboat costs P230; during peak wet season (July to August) this is the only way to reach Sabang, as the road becomes impassable.

Small La Laguna

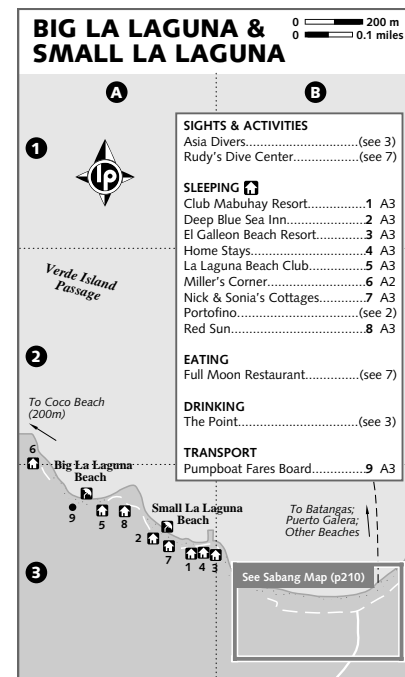
An easy walk over the rocks from Sabang, Small La Laguna's beach is nicer and the atmosphere a lot more relaxed. For the better accommodation, book well in advance.

El Galleon Beach Resort (☎ 0917 814 5107; www.elgalleon.com; r with hot shower & cable TV from US\$31, r with views US\$55; a Ⓢ) Our favourite resort in Small La Laguna, El Galleon has charming, native-style rooms set in a meandering terraced garden. Nine (more expensive) rooms have views. The fine alfresco restaurant (meals from P200) vies with Club Mabuhay's as the best on the beach. If you have the appetite, treat yourself to a hard-core Australian breakfast (P250). The house dive centre is five-star PADI Asia Divers.

Club Mabuhay Resort (☎ 287 3098, 0920 224 6851; www.clubmabuhay.com; r with hot shower & cable TV from US\$36; a Ⓢ) The buildings are Spanish-mission-meets-motel, but Club Mabuhay is still a terrific option. Most rooms have views across the pool to the sea and there is a relaxed alfresco restaurant (meals from P200) out the front with great food.

Nick & Sonia's Cottages (☎ 0917 373 8156, 0920 629 4147; poseidon_boat@yahoo.com; rooms with hot shower, kitchen & fan/air-con P800/1200) Behind Action Divers, this great-value place has immaculate rooms and friendly management. Fan room No 3, on the 2nd floor, has sea views.

Deep Blue Sea Inn (☎ 287 3209, 0920 505 7182; dbsi@catsi.net.ph; d with cold shower & fan P1000, d with air-con, hot water & cable TV P1500; j) Careworn but clean rooms with shared balconies are



stacked all the way up the steep hill, ensuring great views. The restaurant, which looks over the beach, has good cheap meals (from P130) and brewed coffee (P25). Internet is P1.50 per minute.

Red Sun (☎ 287 3241, 0920 235 5259; whitehouse@redsun.ph; r with cable TV from US\$30; a Ⓢ) How it ever got a building permit is a mystery, but with the entire western point to itself this great, white, Spanish mission-style pancake stack is now an indelible part of the landscape. Once you're inside you'll enjoy the finest views on the beach. The serene white adobe interior is all light and curves.

Down the lane beside Camrob Inn is a delightfully un-resorty surprise – a charming little village with trees, market gardens and numerous homestays. Rates are typically P500 a night for a double room, less for longer stays: just walk around and inquire. Some places have air-con and cable TV.

If you're after something midrange and can't get into the other resorts, **Portofino** (☎ 287 3227; www.portofino.com.ph; d from US\$45; a Ⓢ) has a small pool and depressingly dark stucco and stained-wood rooms.

The Point (Map p213; 11 10am-midnight) is strategically placed on the path between Small La Laguna and Sabang. It's rocking every night thanks to a classic playlist – from Credence to the Stones to Marley to New Wave – and four frantic bar staff. Happy hour is from 5.30pm to 6.30pm.

Full Moon Restaurant (11 7am-10.30pm) has cheap burgers (P130), Australian steaks and a well-stocked bar. DVDs are screened most nights.

A pumpboat from Puerto Galera to Small La Laguna costs P220 (20 minutes).

Big La Laguna

Big La Laguna has a nice beach but no real nightlife or restaurants. Guests often end up spending a lot on pumpboats to Sabang.

La Laguna Beach Club (% 287 3181; www.llbcdiveresort.com; d with hot shower & cable TV from US\$50; a s) Despite being on a lovely beachfront, plain, tired-looking rooms are oriented inwards, towards a pool.

Miller's Corner (% 0927 556 4860; d with fan P950, d with air-con, cable TV & fridge P1500) A humble but pleasant and well-kept cluster of rooms on the eastern point of the beach, with great views. A terrific place to go hermitic, with discounts for longer stays.

A pumpboat between Puerto Galera and Big La Laguna Beach is P200 (10 minutes). To Sabang, a pumpboat costs P120.

Coco Beach

Coco Beach Resort (Map p209; % 0919 540 000, 0919 547 0347; www.cocobeach.com; huts per person for 2 days & 1 night from US\$38, for 3 days & 2 nights from US\$48; s) Perfect for families, privately owned Coco Beach is an idyllic, 10-hectare eco-resort, with 96 nipa huts hidden among the palms. Prices include round-trip transport (Manila-Coco Beach-Manila) and buffet breakfast. There are two pools, tennis courts, all manner of pampering options, and a myriad of games and activities for the kids. It also offers inexpensive child minding. Food at the two main restaurants is generally very good and reasonably priced.

The only way to get here is by sea – pumpboats charge an extortionate P200 to Sabang (more at night).

White Beach

From White Beach on to Talipanan there is a very different vibe to Sabang. There are

no girlie bars, and you don't need a diving licence just to hold a conversation.

Unfortunately there's also a noticeable decline in the standard of food and accommodation.

Splendid, long White Beach is a very popular destination for Filipino holidaymakers: it's a sight to behold when they come out in droves in the cool of the late afternoon to bathe and promenade. The eastern end of the beach – where the more upmarket resorts are – is best for swimming.

DIVING

There are a few dive centres at White Beach offering equipment hire and dive courses for the same prices charged in Sabang. The most professional is **Pacific Divers** (% 0920 626 3323; http://pacificdivers.free.fr), next to Villa Natividad. Here you can also rent snorkel sets for P200 per day and motorbikes from P700 per day.

SLEEPING

There is no end of places to stay at White Beach. At the crowded centre, accommodation is routinely plain and viewless. The resorts at the more open eastern and western ends of the beach are cheerier.

In the low season (May to September) you can negotiate discounts of 50% to 75%. However, weekends and public holidays bring in huge crowds from Luzon, and many places double their prices.

Summer Connection Beach Resort and St Francis' Place (% 0917 990 0181, 0920 230 5098; cot-

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Coco Aroma (0919 472 8882; breakfasts P120, veg curry P75, pasta P100-150) Coco Aroma is a backpacker's delight – a humble beach restaurant in the true, Southeast Asian 'hippy trail' tradition. It consists of nothing more than a little wooden kitchen on the sand with a few tables out front. Sometimes there is a small bonfire, too. There is a great vegetarian selection and the food is rich and flavoursome to suit well-travelled taste buds. But it's the vibe that makes Coco Aroma special. A hip playlist features latin, jazz and – of course – reggae. When the sun sets, people strolling along the beach drop by for a drink or to dance by the light of the fire. This is island living as it should be.

tages with fan P800, q with air-con P2500) These two resorts are run by the same management. Summer Connection is right on the beach and all its rooms have balconies. The cottages of St Francis' Place are set into the hill behind Summer Connection and have lovely views. Both places can be accessed from the beach or from a road signposted 'Summer Connection' about 200m past the jeepney stop.

Coco Aroma (% 0919 472 8882; d with shared bathroom P1000, d with bathroom & fan P1500) Set right on the sand, the delightful Coco Aroma has a relaxed charm. Cute and rustic nipa huts are set in a pretty garden at the quiet western end of the beach. It is also fronted by White Beach's best restaurant (see opposite).

Travellers Beach Delight Restaurant & Cottages (% 0921 355 7477; d with fan P1000, q with air-con P1500) Professionally run with clean and light rooms, this is one of the best central-beach budget hotels. The top-floor rooms have good views.

White Beach Nipa Hut (% 0920 205 6019; d with cable TV P1500; a) Has no nipa huts, but two rows of solid concrete rooms with shared verandas. The 2nd floor has sea views.

Villa Natividad (% 0917 482 0505; d with fan/air-con P800/1500) A large two-storey place with plain rooms. Room No 9 is the pick of the bunch, with a partial sea view and a balcony. The fan rooms are stuffy and viewless.

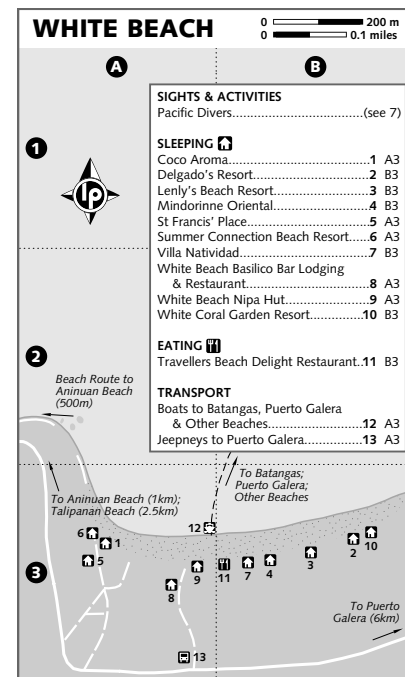
White Beach Basilico Bar Lodging & Restaurant (% 0917 203 6869; cottages P1500; a) Motel-style accommodation set back from the beach on the road into town.

Mindorinne Oriental (% 531 9980, 0917 857 8425; d with fridge & hot shower P2500; a) This is the most upmarket place to stay in at White Beach. It has comfortable, motel-style rooms and rates are the same year-round. There were plans to build a pool when we were there.

Lenly's Beach Resort (% 0919 480 3725; q cottages P2500; a) Lenly's has about a dozen cottages in large grounds at the 'posh' end of White Beach. They'd have beach views if they weren't obscured by a plague of beach-garment vendors.

Delgado's Resort (% 0918 352 6001; d with fan/air-con P1000/1500) Cheaper than Lenly's but almost as well situated. Fan rooms are Spartan, air-con rooms are more pleasant.

White Coral Garden Resort (% 0926 711 3336; d with cable TV P1500; a s) Korean-run White



Coral has drab rooms, though they come with all the trimmings.

EATING

Just as there are few exceptional places to stay in at White Beach, there are hardly any outstanding restaurants. In the evenings, in true Filipino style, the restaurants set up outdoor grills all along the beach, sending up thick clouds of pungent smoke. Most places open at about 7am and close around midnight.

Travellers Beach Delight Restaurant (% 0921 355 7477) is noted for its big, cheap breakfasts (P70 to P100), and pizzas (from P250), including vegetarian options. Nice touches are the ginger tea (P30) and the iced coffee with rum (P35).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

There are frequent jeepneys from Puerto Galera (P15, 20 minutes). A tricycle will cost around P80. By pumpboat, official one-way rates (posted outside Villa Natividad) include P500 to Puerto Galera (25 minutes) and P550 to Sabang (30 minutes).

You can charter a pumpboat to Abra de Ilog from here (P1500, one to 1½ hours). You can also travel directly from Batangas, Luzon (see p205).

Aninuan

For whatever reason, the tourists who flock to White Beach rarely make it as far as Aninuan, meaning it's a much more peaceful place to base yourself. It also offers a wider, cleaner beach and better swimming.

One of the other things that gives Aninuan its appeal is the appearance of the High Rolling Mountains, which are obscured at White Beach by the township. From here to Talipanan things begin to feel a little wild and exotic.

As with White Beach, big discounts are available in the low season, while prices tend to rise on weekends and public holidays.

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation is concentrated along the end closest to White Beach.

Aninuan Beach Resort (Map p209; % 0920 226 8808; aninuanbeachresort@yahoo.com; cottages with fan/air-con P1000/1500) The best value on the beach, this resort has pleasant nipa huts and native-style rooms with balconies that look out to sea. The huts back onto a hill, and all are shaded.

Tamaraw Beach Resort (Map p209; % 0916 613 2845; tamarawbeach@yahoo.com; huts with fan from P800, d with air-con P1500, bungalows P2500) This sprawling place has a plain, concrete hotel with air-con rooms, a row of nipa huts stretched along the beach and some more huts in a shady garden. If you are travelling in a group, the family bungalows on the beach, shaded by a lovely big tree, are an excellent choice. The restaurant does good, cheap Filipino meals (sautéed vegetables P70, breakfast from P60).

Margarita Pizza & Pasta (Map p209; 11am-2pm & 5-9pm) Surprisingly good, given that it's basically just a porta-stove in a shack on the sand. Try the pizzas (P200 to P300), but be prepared to wait.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Aninuan is a 15-minute walk (1.5km) from White Beach along the main road, or a five-minute scramble around the rocky point (wear shoes). Jeepneys run half-hourly between Aninuan and Puerto Galera (P15), or else you can take a tricycle (P100).

Talipanan

Flanked by Mt Talipanan to the west, the impressive domed peak of Malasimbo to the south, and the sea to the north, tiny Talipanan is the furthest frontier of Mindoro Oriental – and it feels like it. The high season/low season price swings in White Beach apply here.

There is some great trekking to be done in the nearby mountains. Talipanan Falls is a popular place for a swim. You can take a tricycle (P150) to the access track, from where it is a 45-minute walk. From your resort, you can also organise a Mangyan guide (around P500 per day) for treks on Mts Malasimbo and Talipanan.

GM's Resort (Map p209; % 0919 352 5930, 0916 434 9299; d with fan P1500, q with air-con & hot shower P2500) GM's is a friendly homestay place with cheery, antique décor. Tidy rooms have attached bathrooms and there is a communal balcony. The 2nd-floor, open-air eating area has wonderful ocean views; breakfasts start at P90, Filipino dishes are around P100.

Bamboo House Beach Resort (Map p209; % 0916 373 1294; d with fan P1200) Bamboo House is another friendly place, which lives up to its name with pleasant, light-filled rooms in a building made of bamboo – the downside being you can hear just about everything going on in the house. There are also concrete rooms in an annexe out the back. The food here is great value: a steak with mushroom sauce will set you back P150.

Readers recommend **Luka's** (Map p209; pizzas P250, pasta from P180; 7am-11pm), at the extreme western end of the beach, for tasty Italian. With the cliffs of the High Rolling Mountains only metres from your table, it certainly is atmospheric.

Jeepneys leave from White Beach for Talipanan every hour or so (P10). Tricycles will not do the trip for less than P100, which is testament to the rockiness of the 2km road. A walk along the bakingly hot sand from Aninuan (3km) will take around an hour. GM's Resort has a pumpboat for hire (P300 to White Beach).

CALAPAN

% 043 / pop 105,910
Calapan (kal-ah-pan), the bustling capital of Mindoro Oriental, is a convenient feeder port for Batangas, Luzon (see p218) and –

as far as most tourists are concerned – one of the stops on the bus–boat route between Manila and Boracay. It is also a good base for hiking formidable Mt Halcon. Apart from that, there is little here to detain you.

JP Rizal St is the busy main drag. Most buses and jeepneys terminate in the market just behind the intersection of JP Rizal St and Juan Luna St (look for the Jollibee).

Information

@M Internet Cafe (del Pilar St; per hr P30; 9am-7pm)

Equitable PCI Bank (JP Rizal St) A block south of Juan Luna St. Will change US dollars and has an ATM (transaction limit P5000).

Metrobank (JP Rizal St) As above.

Provincial Tourism Office (% 286 7046; www.or.mindoro.gov.ph; Capitol Complex, JP Rizal St) Tourism office for Mindoro Oriental. Website has calendar of events.

Tourist assistance centre (% 288 1389; pier; 9am-3.30pm) Sells a useful map of Calapan (P50).

Activities

HIKING

While there's not a lot to see in Calapan, there's plenty of adventure on nearby Mt Halcon – and that's where **Apak Outdoor Shop** (% 288 3391; Quezon Blvd) comes in.

Richard, the proprietor and chief guide for Mt Halcon, doubles as a sandal maker: sturdy flip-flops/sandals soled with tyre-rubber sell for P220/380. Word of Richard's sandals, which make good diving footwear, has reached as far as Boracay.

Richard has been leading trips to Mt Halcon, about 30km southwest of Calapan, for a number of years. At 2505m, Halcon is the country's fourth-highest mountain, but according to the mountaineers it's the toughest to climb. Trails are thickly forested and treacherous, and the weather is wet and unpredictable. In 2004 a European mountaineer died attempting the climb, causing the mountain to be closed for a time; it was due to reopen in 2006.

You need to give two weeks' notice for Richard to organise an expedition. The standard trip is two days up, two days down, taking in the perilous **Monkey Bridge** (a tangle of tree trunks spanning the Dulangan River), the breathtaking **Knife Edge** ridge walk and, finally, the peak itself, which often juts well above the clouds.

The local mountaineers have an arrangement with Mangyan tribespeople in the area,

who are employed as porters on request. The climb costs around P1000 per person per day, which includes a porter, equipment and a guide, but you have to pay extra for food (for yourself and the porter), jeep hire (about P1000 return per jeep) and hiking registration (P40). Gear rental is also extra (tents/sleeping bags P200/150 per day). The maximum number of people per guide is five.

There's also an annual climb held over four days during Holy Week, with around 200 people taking part. The climb costs P500 per person, which includes transport, T-shirt, food and guide.

Richard also organises trail-bike and other trekking tours in and around Mindoro.

It's P10 by tricycle from the pier to **Apak Outdoor Shop**. Ask the driver to let you out at the Land Transportation Office (LTO); the shop is directly across the road.

Sleeping

Calapan Bay Hotel (% 288 1309; calapanbay@yahoo.com; Quezon Blvd; d with hot water from P750; a) Very well located if you want to be close to the pier, this has large, cheerful rooms, windows looking out over the bay and a gorgeous terrace where you can dine over the water while admiring the offshore islands (continental breakfast P80).

Riceland 2 Inn (% 288 5590; MH del Pilar St; tw with bathroom & fan/air-con from P300/525, d with fan/air-con P300/500) This is the best of the budget hotels. From JP Rizal St, wander down to MH del Pilar St, which runs off it, and over the bridge to this single-storey, grey-green complex, which has quiet lodgings and a shared veranda.

Hotel Mayi (% 288 4437; JP Rizal St; s/d with private bathroom & fan P400/500) On the busy main drag, this no-frills hotel has tidy rooms, a homely lobby and helpful staff.

Microtel Inn & Suites (% 286 2624; www.microtel.philippines.com; M Roxas St; s/d with hot shower, cable TV, Internet port & continental breakfast P1900/2300; a s) This branch of the international Microtel chain has helpful staff, comfortable, well-kept rooms, a large pool in lush grounds and a very reasonably priced restaurant (Salisbury steak P150, cocktails P60 to P120).

Anahaw Island View Resort (% 288 8260/8982; www.dalcan.com/anahaw; d with cable TV, shared hot-water bathroom & fan/air-con P500/700) On the quiet western fringes of town, 2km from the town centre (P15 by tricycle), this friendly resort

THE MANGYAN

The Mangyan were the original settlers of Mindoro, first arriving on the island around 800 years ago. They are a proto-Malay people, derived from the same ethnic stock as the majority Malay. The Mangyan comprise seven – some say eight – linguistically similar tribes spread along the length of the island's mountainous interior. They were actually once a coastal people; records show they may have been trading with Chinese merchants as early as AD 1250, but successive waves of Malay, Spanish and Moro (Muslim) immigrants pushed them into the hinterland. As a survival strategy, the Mangyan have generally chosen to yield land rather than fight against invaders. Even today, the greatest challenge the Mangyan face is being pushed off their lands by encroaching farmers.

The Mangyan are estimated to number around 100,000 people, or 10% of Mindoro's population. They have preserved their traditional culture to a much greater extent than many other Philippine indigenous groups. Many tribespeople still wear traditional costumes, such as the trademark loincloth, or *ba-ag*, worn by males. Animism – belief in the spirits that inhabit nature – remains a potent force in Mangyan cosmology, though often now with a Christian twist.

Where possible, tribespeople continue to pursue traditional livelihoods. Most Mangyan are swidden farmers. During the dry season they burn scrub and forest to clear the ground and fertilise the soil; they then plant a succession of crops, including tubers, maize, pulses and 'mountain' rice (a dry rice variety). In the wet season, if there is enough game, they will hunt pigs, monkeys, birds and other small animals.

A number of tribes also grow crops and make handicrafts for trade with non-Mangyans. Visitors to Puerto Galera are quite likely to come across the skilfully woven, hexagonal *nito* (woody vine) baskets of the Iraya tribespeople, who live mostly in the mountains around Abra de Ilog.

The Mangyan have a history of being persecuted by newcomers to the island or being involuntarily caught up in their wars. The Spanish punished the Mangyan for their close relations with the 'Moro' (Muslim missionaries). With the arrival of the Americans at the beginning of the 20th century, Mangyan people were put to work on sugar estates, or forced into reservations much like those created for Native Americans. In this century, Mangyans have been caught in the crossfire between the Philippine Army and the NPA (New People's Army).

That the Mangyan are still able to hold on to their culture despite centuries of incursions from outsiders is a testimony to their vitality and tenacity. If you are interested in finding out more, the **Mangyan Heritage Center** (☎ 288 5318; B Finemann Compound, Calero, Calapan; admission free; ⌚ 8am–5pm Mon–Fri) has thousands of essays and photos as well as video documentaries all available to the public.

is a good choice, with cute, nautically themed nipa huts and views over the beach. Management can organise island-hopping tours and treks inland.

Parang Beach Resort (☎ 288 6120; parang_beach@yahoo.com; d with hot shower & cable TV from P1200; a) The best of the few resorts on the black-sand beach 4km or 5km east of town (P20 by tricycle). On an immaculate lawn by the sea, it has well-appointed nipa-style cottage rooms with balconies. You can charter a pumpboat here to island-hop for only P400.

Eating

Calapan is, frankly, an awful place to eat. That said, a block down from JP Rizal St, cool, clean and quiet **L&V Snack Restaurant** (MH

del Pilar St; meals P50–100; ⌚ 8am–late) is a cut above the usual *carinderia* (eatery). The popular **Oriental Villa Tea House** (Leuterio St; meals P120–220; ⌚ 8am–late) does reasonable Filipino–Chinese food, but be sure to specify if you don't want meat with your 'vegetable' dish.

Getting There & Away BOAT

A tricycle from the town centre to the pier (4km) should cost P20. The only destination from Calapan pier is Batangas, Luzon. All tickets are purchased at the pier.

From the pier, it's a pleasant 45-minute journey to Batangas on the fast-craft **Super-Cat** (☎ 288 3179 in Calapan, 043-723 8227 in Batangas; P200), which has frequent departures from 5am to 5.30pm daily.

Montenegro (☎ 043-723 8294 in Batangas) and **Starlight** (☎ 043-723 9391 in Batangas) shipping lines run much slower car ferries between Calapan and Batangas around the clock (P110, 2½ hours).

BUS & JEEPNEY

Calapan is 48km from Puerto Galera via a rough, winding road with spectacular views across Verde Island Passage. Jeepneys to Puerto Galera leave hourly from the Motoc terminal on JP Rizal St, 1.5km south of central Calapan (P10 by tricycle). Departures are from 6am to 5pm daily (P60, 1½ hours). Buses don't operate between Calapan and Puerto Galera. Small buses leave for Roxas via Pinamalayan from the market on Juan Luna St, departing regularly from 6am until about 1pm (P160, three hours, daily).

Large buses meet the ferries at Calapan pier and continue on to Roxas (P160, three hours) via Pinamalayan. They run from around 5am to 4pm daily. Air-con minibuses compete with the buses for passengers.

ROXAS

☎ 043 / pop 41,265

The best thing to come out of Roxas is the road to Calapan. Literally. This is the only paved highway in Mindoro, which if you've done any travel here is something you're bound to appreciate.

Roxas is a drab town whose presence on the tourist circuit is entirely due to its status as a staging post on the **Strong Republic Nautical Highway** – the interlocking road-sea route that runs through Luzon, Mindoro, the Visayas and Mindanao. From Roxas you're only a few hours by boat from Caticlan, and therefore, Boracay (for details, see right).

Should you stop here, you're sure to see the lively market in the town centre, where the buses terminate and the hotels are located. It's at its best on Wednesday and Sunday mornings, when Mangyan people and other villagers come into town to sell their wares.

Information

Engineer 'Bhoy' Villaluna is president of the Roxas Tourism Council and is a good source of information. You'll find him at the Roxas Villa Hotel (see right).

Next to the Roxas Villa Hotel is the **CATSI** telephone centre, where you can make international calls.

If you're desperate, most pawn shops will change US dollars.

Sleeping & Eating

Roxas' hotels are all clustered around the market.

Roxas Villa Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 289 2026, 289 2518; Administration St; d with fan/air-con from P370/550) With its reception desk hidden down the covered drive, Roxas Villa has simple, clean rooms. The main attraction here is the charming and gregarious host, 'Bhoy' Villaluna, who will tell you all there is to know about Roxas. He might even offer to take you to **St Rafael Cave**, which he formerly mined, while a chemical engineer, for guano (bat droppings) to use as fertiliser. It's essentially a deep, musty hole in the side of a hill.

Lyf Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 289 2819; Magsaysay Ave; d with fan/air-con P750/900) Lyf is Roxas' business hotel. It's modern and charmless, but comfortable. The restaurant does the best food in town: a Filipino breakfast is P45, dinners go for P130 to P190.

All the buzz in Roxas these days is centred on the area around **Dangay pier**, which has been booming since it was fitted out in 2005 to accommodate big car ferries bound for Caticlan. Skirting the black-sand beach to the east of the terminal is a long row of restaurants, videoke bars and brothels, all of which are lit up at night like Christmas trees. **3 Js Floating Bar and Restaurant** (⌚ 11am–late) is a lively and welcoming place built over a fish pond; cook what you catch for P200 to P300.

The dirt road along the beach is not lit, and tourists visiting there after dark are advised to go with their own transport. A return trip by tricycle with a two-hour wait will cost about P200 at night.

Getting There & Away BOAT

Roxas is the main connector port for Caticlan, Panay. It also has services to Romblon.

Dangay pier (☎ 289 2813) is a P10 tricycle ride from the market. For those headed to Panay (or Boracay) there are six daily car ferry services to Caticlan (P220, four hours).

For Romblon, a ferry departs for Odiongan at 4pm, Wednesday to Friday (P175, three hours). A big pumpboat departs for Odiongan at 10.30am every day except

Wednesday and Sunday (P160, three hours). There is also a service to Looc (P160, three hours) on alternate days.

BUS & JEEPNEY

Buses and air-con vans depart every 45 minutes for Calapan (P160, three hours) from 6am to 4pm, daily. There are two terminals: one on the corner of Morente and Magsaysay Aves, the other near the corner of Magsaysay Ave and Administration St. From each terminal, one van a day leaves at 8.30am bound for Manila (P500, eight hours) – with a little help from a ferry.

Three jeepneys a day leave for San José (P250, five hours) via Bulalacao (P60, two hours) from the corner of Morente and Magsaysay Aves, departing 6.30am, 8.30am and 10am. In the wettest weather (between May and September), the rough road between Bulalacao and San José can become impassable and you have to take a boat for this leg of the journey (add another P50).

Jeepneys terminating at Bulalacao leave daily from 5am to around 3pm (P60, two hours).

BULALACAO

☎ 043 / pop 36,952

If you want to travel around the mountainous southern tip of Mindoro, you must go via the remote fishing town of Bulalacao (bull-*ah*-la-cow). The trip is usually done by road, but from July to September, when rains can make the dirt roads treacherous, it's often done by sea.

Though the town itself is nondescript, it is surrounded by islands and coves with white sand and coral, leading some to speculate that Bulalacao may be the next Puerto Galera. At the time of writing, some resort owners were said to be buying up land in the area to develop, but there were as yet no facilities.

From Bulalacao harbour, you can hire a boat for **island hopping** (per day P1000). Some of the islands around Bulalacao are said to have good diving and snorkelling. For help with organising island hopping and for **homestay accommodation** (per person incl food, around P500), contact the **mayor's office** (☎ 0920 179 8455).

Jeepneys to/from Roxas head off every hour or so until 3pm (P60, two hours). The jeepney stop is under a large tree about 500m from town on the Roxas road.

In the dry months, three daily jeepneys stop in Bulalacao on their way through to San José. From Bulalacao the trip costs P200 (three hours).

In the wet months, one pumpboat leaves Bulalacao bound for San José around 10am daily (P250, three hours); another leaves San José bound for Bulalacao around 11am. The pumpboat for San José must moor in Bulalacao's deeper waters beyond a breakwater. Small boats shuttle passengers back and forth from the shore (P10 one way).

MINDORO OCCIDENTAL

The province of Mindoro Occidental is more isolated, less developed and much less frequently visited than its neighbour to the east. In most places you're more likely to be taken for a missionary than a traveller. The great majority of tourists here make a beeline straight for Sablayan, the entry point for idyllic North Pandan Island and the diving mecca, Apo Reef. Another attraction is ruggedly beautiful Mt Iglit-Baco National Park, a popular hiking destination and home to the critically endangered *tamaraw* buffalo.

The mostly coastal road from Abra de Ilog to San José is an especially rough and dusty one.

ABRA DE ILOG

☎ 043 / pop 22,212

The grubby port town of Abra de Ilog is the northern gateway to Mindoro's west coast.

Little more than a bundle of small buildings, Abra's port of Wawa is well served by boats from Batangas. If you arrive by boat you'll see why there's no usable road west of Puerto Galera: a cloud-scraping wall of jagged mountains runs right to the shore.

Most people move straight on to more inviting Mamburao after arriving in Abra, but it's possible to stay overnight. About 1km from the pier (P10 by tricycle), **L & P Lodging House** (☎ 0918 528 2173; r with fan P200) has very basic rooms. A couple of small eateries by the pier should help get you through the night.

Getting There & Away

From Batangas (Luzon), **Montenegro Shipping Lines** (☎ 723 8294) runs car ferries to Wawa

pier (P130, 2½ hours) around the clock, seven times daily.

From Mindoro Oriental, a pumpboat between White Beach and Wawa should cost around P1500 (one to 1½ hours).

Jeepneys connect with the boats to take passengers south to Mamburao (P40, one hour), but the trip is smoother by air-con minivan (P70, 45 minutes). If you'd rather not wait for a van to pick up its full complement of 10 passengers you may choose to charter it (P700).

MAMBURAO

☎ 043 / pop 30,378

Mamburao is a dusty little town with a bad case of tricycle-itis.

The best thing to do here is to ride one of those tricycles 4km north of town (P10/30 regular/charter) to **Alii Beach Resort** (☎ 0910 850 8845; fan/air-con cottages from P700/1400; ☎). Pronounced *ali-ee*, Alii is a quiet resort on the edge of a pretty beach cove. Concrete cottages are nicely laid out among rows of palm trees on a large lawn. The fan cottages are great value. Filipino dishes are around P140.

Getting There & Away

Buses depart all morning till around midday for San José (P190, seven hours) via Sablayan (P95, three hours). They leave from the bus stand on National Rd just north of town.

Jeepneys between Mamburao and Abra de Ilog (P40, one hour) depart from near the bridge on the northern edge of town in sync with boats to/from Wawa pier. Air-con minivans (P70, 45 minutes) also connect with the boats to/from Wawa. They leave from a small terminal near the bus stand.

SABLAYAN

☎ 043 / pop 63,685

A welcome sight after the long road journey from either the north or the south, Sablayan (*sab-lai-an*) sits astride the Bagong Sabang River. It has a lively market, and boats of all shapes and sizes are strung along its river-mouth port. For most travellers, Sablayan's appeal lies in its proximity to North Pandan Island and Apo Reef, but the hinterland also has its attractions. Sablayan is the best leaping-off point for those wishing to trek in Mt Iglit-Baco National Park.

Activities

There are a number of **walks** and **waterfalls** in the countryside around Sablayan. **Libau Lake** is famed for its white lotuses, and is a popular spot for fishing and bird-watching. It's situated inside Sablayan Prison Farm, which is an 'attraction' in its own right: the inmates farm and fish, and make handicrafts that are sold locally.

The municipal **Eco-Tourism Office** (☎ 0910 467 4915; Municipal Plaza; h 8am-5pm) and **Adventure Camp** (☎ 0918 795 9720; embabia@yahoo.com) both offer a range of equally good-value tours around Sablayan (ranging from P1000 to P2000). They can also organise trips to, and provide information for, Mt Iglit-Baco National Park (p222) and Apo Reef (p222).

Sleeping

Emily Hotel (115 Gozar St; s with fan & shared bathroom P150, d with fan & private bathroom P300) **On the breakwater**, next to the boats to North Pandan Island, this is a friendly place with small, basic rooms. The restaurant does budget meals for P60, or there's a nearby market.

Adventure Camp (☎ 0918 795 9720; embabia@yahoo.com; d with fan P500, r for 8 people P1000) **Visible from the harbour channel**, Adventure Camp lacks the clean beaches, snorkelling and, above all, the great food of Pandan, but it is still an option for people looking to explore the hinterland of Sablayan. And it's inexpensive. Cabin rooms are large and comfortable, and short-order meals range from P40 to P60.

Getting There & Away

For services to North Pandan Island, see p222.

Buses and jeepneys headed north and south run down the main drag, National Rd, in the town centre. Buses going north stop in Sablayan on their way to Mamburao (P100, three hours). The last service is around 3.30pm. Buses run all day to San José (P95, three hours) in the south.

NORTH PANDAN ISLAND

This postcard-perfect, privately owned resort island is a low-key tropical paradise. It has a long, curving, white-sand beach with your choice of sand, sea grass or coral, just off the shore. There are a number of prime **dive spots** that surround the island. Mornings and late afternoons you can snorkel

out to watch sea turtles grazing the sea grass just metres from the beach. Nights are spent feasting like royalty, enjoying drinks on the sand and star-gazing.

There's only one catch: it can get bloody hot, and there is not enough electricity for fans.

Mariposa Diving, which can be contacted through Pandan Island Resort (below), charges US\$26 for 'fun dives' with equipment. An open-water course will set you back US\$295, and snorkelling gear rents for P150 per day.

North Pandan Island is the ideal base from which to explore nearby Apo Island: sailing time is about two hours. The prices for boat trips vary with the number of passengers: a day trip to Apo Island with picnic will probably cost you around US\$45; a two-day, three-night trip will cost around US\$150. The best time for diving is October to May.

When island life gets too slow – which it can – day trips on the mainland can be had through Adventure Camp (p221) in Sablayan.

Sleeping & Eating

Pandan Island Resort (☎ 0919 305 7821, 02-526 6929 in Manila; www.pandan.com; budget s/d US\$10/12, standard bungalows US\$20, deluxe cottages from US\$36) An idyllic combination of simple living and pure tropical decadence, this laid-back, smoothly run resort has rudimentary budget rooms (you pay extra for a light globe) with a shared bathroom, comfortable bungalows and delightful deluxe cottages for one to four people. Even in the deluxe cottages, showers are salt water (fresh water is provided in buckets) and there are no fans. The buffet lunch and dinner are feasts that outdo most five-star restaurants. Breakfast is US\$3 and main meals are US\$7. Full board is US\$15. It costs P50 to visit the island for the day: time your visit for lunch!

Getting There & Away

Visitors from Sablayan are often obliged to make the crossing in a 'flat boat' (P100, 20 minutes) – the tiny, flimsy, slow and incredibly noisy river craft that wait for customers opposite the Emily Hotel. If the seas are rough, don't risk the flat boat: call the resort from the breakwater to arrange a trip on their service pumpboat; it does

three scheduled trips a day for which there is no charge, otherwise it's P100.

The resort can organise land and sea transfers to/from Abra de Ilog and San José. An air-con van (maximum seven people) from San José to Sablayan will cost US\$115, from Abra US\$140. A boat from North Pandan Island to San José costs US\$215 (maximum 15 people).

APO REEF NATIONAL PARK

At 35 sq km, Apo Reef National Park (not to be confused with the area around the other Apo Island off the south coast of Negros) is the largest atoll-like reef in the Philippines. It is bisected by a narrow channel running east to west that is perfect for diving. The crystal-clear waters abound with life, including 285 species of fish and 197 species of coral. Here divers have a good chance of seeing large marine animals such as hammerhead sharks, turtles and manta rays. The three islands of the reef also play host to a variety of turtle and bird species, including the endangered Nicobar pigeon.

North Pandan Island is the ideal place from which to visit the reef, but trips can be organised from as far away as Puerto Galera, from where large yachts will make the trip in around eight hours. Pandan Island Resort (left) and Sablayan's Adventure Camp (p221) both charge around US\$150 for a three-day, two-night trip.

MT IGLIT-BACO NATIONAL PARK

Intrepid travellers who trek to the top of these remote mountains may be rewarded with a sighting of the elusive wild *tamaraw* (native buffalo). The area is known for New People's Army (NPA) activity – and while this is unlikely to present any danger to tourists we advise you to make your own enquiries.

It's a day-and-a-half's climb to the top of Mt Iglit, and a day back down. The climbing season is October to May. Inside the park, the Tamaraw Conservation Program has a breeding station known as the Gene Pool, which has bunnhouse accommodation. The only *tamaraws* bred in captivity live here. Note that this is *not* a day trip: anyone visiting the conservation area must plan for four or five days in the wild.

The Eco-Tourism Office and Adventure Camp (p221) in Sablayan can arrange tours with a week's notice. Tours take five days,

include transport, food and a guide, and cost from P7000 to P10,000.

If you come in April you should be able to tag along as a volunteer on the annual *tamaraw* head-count with the **Protected Area Office** (☎ 0928 247 9488; Airport Road, San José), which involves a five-day camp-out. If you're thinking of travelling independently to the park you must contact Dante Diwa at the Protected Area Office, who will arrange a guide (P250 per day) and permits (no charge). You will need your own gear and provisions. A chartered jeepney to the park entrance east of Calintaan will cost around P2000 from either San José or Sablayan.

SAN JOSÉ

☎ 043 / pop 111,009

The southernmost town in Mindoro Occidental, San José is notable for having an airport. And that's about it.

You can hire a pumpboat from the pier (P1000) to Ambulong Reef. There's good diving here, but you must bring your own gear. Locals head out to the beaches north of town to relax by the water with a few drinks.

Information

INTERNET & TELEPHONE

Millennium One Computer Center (C Liboro St; per hr P100; 7 8am-6.30pm)

RCPI International Telephone Office (cnr C Liboro & Rizal Sts; 7 8am-5pm Mon-Sun)

MONEY

Metrobank (Sikatuna St) Has an ATM that accepts MasterCard and Cirrus cards. Changes travellers cheques.

PNB (Philippine National Bank; MH Del Pilar St) Changes travellers cheques.

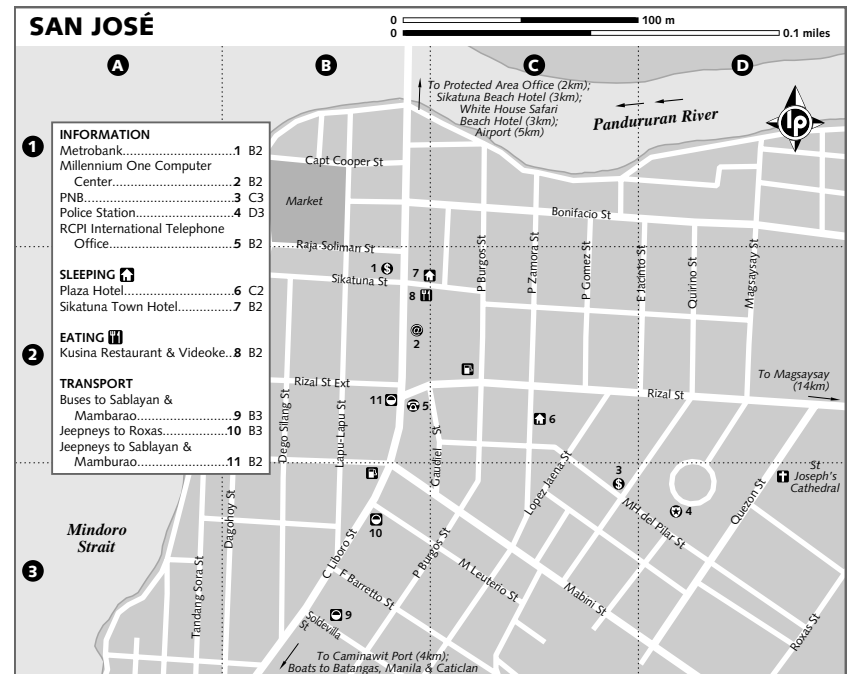
TOURIST INFORMATION

Protected Area Office (☎ 0928 247 9488; Airport Rd) Dante Diwa can assist with trips to the Gene Pool at Mt Iglit-Baco National Park.

Sleeping & Eating

The best that can be said of the accommodation in San José proper is that it's better than the food. North of town, on the way to the airport, a couple of beach-side hotels raise the standard on both fronts.

Sikatuna Town Hotel (☎ 491 1274; Sikatuna St; tw/d P140, d with fan/air-con P300/550) This hotel is a



friendly place with small, very basic rooms. Get a room at the back or cop an earful of the amplified warbling from the videoke over the road. It has a free airport drop-off service.

Kusina Restaurant & Videoke (Sikatuna St; meals P110-180; 𑀓 6.30am-11pm) Opposite the Sikatuna Town Hotel, Kusina does all the 'favourites': beefsteak, chop suey or barbecued chicken with rice. A Filipino breakfast is P60.

Plaza Hotel (☎ 491 4661; P Zamora St; s with fan & shared/private bathroom P200/300, d with bathroom & fan/air-con from P400/800) This is a sleek but soulless place with large, tiled rooms above a cavernous lobby.

A P20 tricycle ride north of town will bring you to two hotels facing each other over a shallow, brown-sand beach.

Sikatuna Beach Hotel (☎ 491 2182; Airport Rd; d with fan & cold water P400, d with air-con, TV & hot water P750) This is the budget choice. In an annexe, Sikatuna Beach Hotel has drab but spacious rooms. The restaurant does Filipino meals costing P80 to P150, which you can eat in the shaded cottages overlooking the water. It has a free airport drop-off service.

White House Safari Beach Hotel (☎ 491 1656; edithpark@yahoo.com; Airport Rd; d with air-con & hot shower P2200, 4-bed ste P3300) The best food and accommodation in San José, the White House is more like a rich relative's mansion than a hotel. It has luxurious rooms with balconies, marble bathrooms, fridges and TVs, and a giant, two-room family suite facing the water. A big American breakfast in a dining room overlooking an immaculately kept garden is P190; other meals range from P120 to P200. Book at least a week in advance.

Getting There & Away

AIR

San José's airport is about 5km northwest of town (P25, 20 minutes by tricycle).

Two airlines service Roxas and both have a desk at San José airport that can issue tickets. **Asian Spirit** (☎ 491 4151, 02-855 3333 in Manila; www.asianspirit.com) has daily flights between San José and Manila (45 minutes). **South-East Asian Airlines** (☎ 491 4158, 02-884 1521 in Manila; www.flyseair.com) also has daily flights to Manila (45 minutes).

BOAT

Boats to/from San José dock at Caminawit Port, 4km south of town (P15 by tricycle).

Montenegro Shipping Lines (☎ 043-491 5502 in Batangas) has an overnight passenger service to Batangas, Luzon (ordinary/air-con/suite P375/475/1250, 12 hours, nightly).

Moreta Shipping Lines (☎ 02-245 3025 in Manila) has two overnight services per week to Manila, departing from San José on Saturday and Monday evenings (ordinary/air-con/suite P450/550/1500, 15 hours), and departing from Manila on Thursday and Sunday evenings. It also has a weekly service to Caticlan, Panay (ordinary/air-con P300/450, six hours), departing from San José at 11am on Friday and from Caticlan at noon on Saturday.

BUS & JEEPNEY

Regular buses run between San José and Mamburao (P190, seven hours) via Sablayan (P77, 3½ hours) until around noon. Jeepneys ply the same route until around 3pm. It's a bum-numbingly long stretch to Mamburao, best broken by a stop in Sablayan.

Three to four jeepneys per day travel to Roxas (P250, five hours) via Bulalacao (P200, three hours), departing between 6am and 1pm. During the wet season the road can be impassable, and you have to take a boat to Bulalacao (P250, three hours), and then a jeepney for the Bulalacao-Roxas leg.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'