

North Luzon



Generalisations fall short when describing this vast region of misty mountains, sprawling plains and endless coastline, whose population is as diverse and unique as the landscape.

The central mountain range known as the Cordillera is the region's trophy piece, with lush green forests blanketing vast areas of gloriously crooked earth. Isolated sandy beaches ring almost the entire coastline. In the rice terraces of Banaue and elsewhere, humans and nature have collaborated on one of the world's truly sublime displays of beauty and ingenuity. Off Luzon's northern tip, the grassy hills of the Batanes islands possess their own austere beauty.

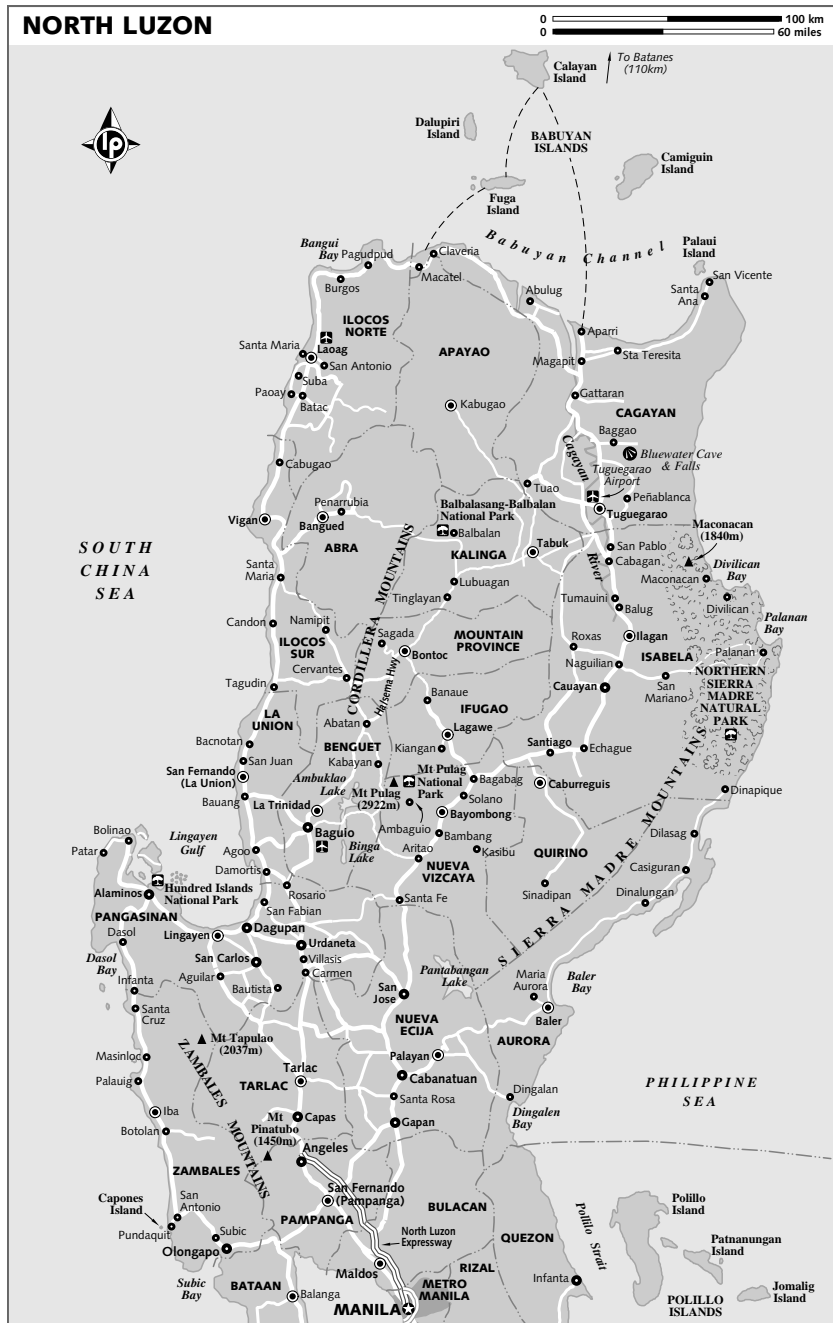
The region is an adventure-lover's paradise, with mountainous networks of ancient walking trails perfect for trekking. Many of these trails lead to remote villages where tribespeople live much as they have for centuries. There are endless caves in Cagayan province, endless white-water rapids on Kalinga's Chico River and endless surf breaks around the island. If you have your own kayak, windsurfer or surf board, undiscovered breaks, beaches and rapids await.

North Luzon offers plenty to more sedentary types as well. Culture aficionados can get their fill in Vigan, where old Spanish colonial mansions line the streets of the old town, and history buffs can follow MacArthur's men on the wide beaches around Lingayen.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Feasting your eyes on the awesome rice terraces around **Banaue** (p170), **Batad** (p173) and **Bontoc** (p167)
- Taking a step back in time in the lovely Mestizo District of **Vigan** (p145)
- Chilling out for days – or weeks – in **Sagada** (p162), aka backpacker HQ
- Discovering a brave new world in **Batanes** (p180), the Philippines' final frontier
- Braving the wild rapids on the **Chico River** (p169) between Tinglayan and Tabuk
- Taking in the ubiquitous acoustic guitar music and cool mountain air of **Baguio** (p153)
- Watching thousands of bats make their early-evening pilgrimage over **Pinacanauan River** (p179), near Tuguegarao
- Getting up close and personal with the mummies of **Kabayán** (p161)
- Surfing in **San Fernando (La Union)** (p142) or at the breaks around Baler, including famously fickle **Charlie's Point** (p176)





Climate

Lowland areas of North Luzon adhere to the standard Philippine monsoon climate, with a long dry season from November to May and a shorter wet season from June to October. December and January are the most pleasant months, with centigrade temperatures dropping into the low 20s and getting cooler and drier the further north you go. The April-to-June period is brutally hot throughout the lowlands. Typhoons start storming up the Pacific in July but usually only make direct hits on the northeast and Batanes. Beware: you could get stranded for days in Batanes when a typhoon gallops through. The rains are most intense in August and September.

The highlands are a different story. The Cordillera is liable to get rain any time of the year, but the rains are particularly intense from May to September and the higher the elevation, the more intense the rains. Landslides often disrupt travel on the spectacular dirt 'highways' of the Cordillera during this time. Between November and February it can get quite cool in the highlands; around Christmas, night-time temperatures can drop into the single digits at elevations over 1000m.

Language

There are myriad languages spoken in North Luzon, with dozens of dialects heard

in the Cordillera alone. The language jumble is most confusing in Kalinga, where just about every village has its own dialect. In the Cordillera, people are more likely to understand Ilocano or even English than the country's national language, Filipino.

In the lowlands, the principal dialects are Filipino and Ilocano, which is the predominant language not only in Ilocos but also in Cagayan, Isabela and La Union. Other common dialects include Pangasinan, common in the Lingayen Gulf area, and Sambal, the language of the Zambales people.

Dangers & Annoyances

There are sporadic shootouts between the government and the New People's Army (NPA) in mountainous areas of North Luzon. Such violence usually occurs way off the beaten track in provinces like Aurora and Isabela, and rarely, if ever, affects tourists.

Tribal wars occasionally break out between villages in Kalinga and Mountain Province. Not even the Philippine government bothers intervening in these squabbles, some of which go back centuries. The last thing quarrelling tribes want to do is involve tourists in their affairs; still, before heading to Kalinga you may want to check with the police in Bontoc to see if there are any hot spots you should avoid.

UNDERGROUND MONEY *Michael Grosberg & Mic Looby*

It's more than likely that before Japanese General Tomoyuki Yamashita was captured and executed in 1946, he organised the burial of billions of dollars worth of gold and other treasures plundered from all over Southeast Asia during WWII. The story goes that the speedy American advance prevented the Japanese from withdrawing their treasure. There are supposedly 172 'documented' burial sites, the majority in North Luzon.

As if the public coffers were not enough for him, some people say that ex-president Marcos also supplemented his fortune by locating many of the sites. In 1998, a group of middle-aged Philippine soldiers filed a claim in California and Zurich against the Marcos estate for their efforts in unearthing an estimated 60,000 tonnes of gold and gemstones between 1973 and 1985. A joint affidavit, signed by around 100 soldiers, accompanied the claim. These men were apparently members of 'Task Force Restoration', ostensibly formed to fight communist rebels, but primarily engaged in 'massive diggings and excavations'. This in turn spawned a secret government industry involved in melting down the gold to remove all traces of its origin, all helped by Marcos' martial law.

Even recently, a Japanese delegation allegedly searching for the bones of relatives in Isabela were discovered by the government to actually be on a treasure hunt. No doubt there are many amateurs, hucksters and con artists involved, but there are 'professionals' as well, and enough validity to some of the claims to keep them coming. The Philippine government isn't likely to discourage them either, since the law stipulates that it's entitled to a hefty chunk of any findings.

Getting There & Around

Regular flights connect Manila with Basco (Batanes), Tuguegarao, Laoag and Baguio. Air-con buses link the major North Luzon cities, while ordinary buses and jeepneys ply the local routes.

Driving is a great way to see Luzon's more remote regions, such as the Zambales coast and the Cordillera. Keep in mind that you'll need a pretty good 4WD for the latter.

Elsewhere in the region the provincial roads are packed with myriad obstacles: *kalabaw* (water buffalo), naked toddlers, homemade tractors, fornicating dogs, drying rice, funeral processions, maniacal bus drivers, rogue poker games, jeepneys belching blinding black smoke, litters of swine, gnawed fish bones hurtling out of car windows, burning brush, all manner of fowl, and constantly emptying schoolyards.

You can rent cars in Manila (p114).

ZAMBALES COAST

If you're looking to escape Manila for a few days, the closest beach resorts by car are on this lonely 100km stretch of coastline west of Mt Pinatubo. The resorts here tend to fill up with videoke-loving locals during the Philippine 'summer' months of March to May, but at other times you'll have them to yourself. On the eastern side of the Zambales province, the Zambales Mountains provide scenery, myriad waterfalls and, when the weather's not too hot, excellent hiking.

PUNDAQUIT

☎ 047 / pop 1800

The main draw in this small fishing barangay southwest of San Antonio is Capones Island, which has an old Spanish lighthouse, good snorkelling and a beautiful white-sand beach. The island has decent surfing for experienced riders from July to October. You can rent *bangka* from resorts or fishermen in Pundaquit and spend half a day cruising around Capones Island and neighbouring Camera Island for around P450.

Steer clear of Pundaquit on weekends from March to May, when city-dwelling Filipinos descend en masse.

If you want to learn to surf, head to **Crystal Beach Resort** (☎ 913 4309; www.crystalbeach.com.ph;

d P1500; a) in barangay San Narciso, 7km north of San Antonio on the National Hwy. Part evangelical retreat, part surf camp, it gives new meaning to the word 'bizarre', but it does have boards (P500 per day) and surfing instruction (P450 for a half-day lesson) on offer. From Manila these are your closest surfing lessons. There are rooms here but the place is a bit creepy; stay in Pundaquit or, even better, in Botolan, 35km north.

There are a handful of resorts in Pundaquit but the beach is too dirty and crammed with fishing boats to be enjoyable. **Nora's Beach Resort** (☎ 0918 278 8188; d P1500; pa), just north of Pundaquit, is a quieter option with a less hectic beach. Management can arrange dive trips to the islands if you book ahead.

To get here from Olongapo or Manila, take any bus heading toward Iba (opposite), get off in San Antonio, then take a tricycle 4km to Pundaquit (P30).

BOTOLAN & IBA

☎ 047 / pop 34,500

These neighbouring towns, about 45km north of San Antonio, have the best beach resorts in Zambales and are convenient bases for hikes in the Zambales Mountains.

Among the best hiking destinations in the region are **Mt Tapulao** (High Peak; 2037m), the highest mountain in the Zambales range; **Koto Mining River** and its many waterfalls; and the Aeta village of **Cabatuan**. The **tourism office** (Capitol Building, Iba) and staff in most resorts can help you out with directions and/or locating guides.

Ally-Com (per hr P20), on the main road in Iba, has high-speed Internet access.

In Masinloc, 15km north of Iba, you'll find **Stingray Diving Resort** (☎ 821 1624; www.bay-side-resort.com), the area's only diving facility.

Sleeping

BOTOLAN

Botolan's beaches are cleaner, nicer and quieter than those in Iba.

Rama Beach Resort (☎ 0918 910 1280; www.rama-beach.com; d P1195, cottages with fan/air-con P600/1295; pais) Decent accommodation, attractive grounds, and a nice restaurant with a library and pool table are the highlights of this Australian-owned resort, 8km south of Botolan proper. Deep-sea fishing is on offer (P1500 per half-day).

West Coast Beach Resort (☎ 0917 732 0716; west_coast_beach@yahoo.com; d P1200; pas) This Norwegian-owned outfit has better rooms than neighbouring Rama, but the grounds are not as nice. It's 8km south of Botolan proper.

Botolan Wildlife Farm (☎ 0917 734 2206; www.botolanwildlifefarm.com; Barangay San Juan; r P650; p) For a change of pace stay at this quirky little menagerie nestled at the foot of the Zambales Mountains. Eccentric Swiss zoologist Martin Zoller has created a humane sanctuary for an array of rescued beasts, including a massive Siberian tiger. The rooms have a shared balcony with great views of the animal pens and the mountains beyond. To get there take a tricycle (P40) 4km east from a well-marked turn-off on the National Hwy, just south of Botolan centre.

IBA

The best resorts in Iba are to the north in barangay Bangantalinga.

Palmera Garden Beach Resort (☎ 811 2109; www.palmeragarden.com; Bangantalinga; d P1250; paiss) This Swiss-owned resort is by far the most service-oriented in the vicinity. There is a large open-air restaurant with an eclectic menu and tasty food. The rooms are a bit institutional, but are well kept.

Lindamar (☎ 02-412 4803 in Manila; Bangantalinga; d P1200-1500; pa) This is a French-owned place with bright, funky rooms surrounding an attractive, leafy courtyard. Lindamar runs snorkelling trips to a reef 300m offshore (P30 per person).

Getting There & Away

Victory Liner (☎ 811 1392) has air-con buses every half hour to Pasay, Sampaloc and Caloocan in Manila (P280, six hours) via Olongapo (P116, two hours). Victory Liner also heads north every half hour to Alaminos (P110, three hours) and Lingayen (P150, four hours), with a bus transfer in Santa Cruz.

LINGAYEN GULF

Great sunsets and rolling breakers are the hallmarks of the Lingayen (*leen-gay-en*) Gulf, which dominates the coastline of Pangasinan Province, birthplace of Philippine national hero José Rizal.

The gulf played a central role in WWII. In December 1941, invading Japanese troops made their first major amphibious landing in the Philippines along the coast south of Bauang, La Union. Three years later, liberating American forces came ashore a bit further west of that, at Lingayen.

The gulf's water tends to be murky, and the coral reefs have been all but destroyed by dynamite and cyanide fishing. Still, there's no shortage of beach resorts scattered along the coastline from Bolinao to San Fernando (La Union). The latter has long been one of the most popular resort destinations in Luzon, drawing an odd mix of families, surfers and those keeping the sex trade alive.

BOLINAO & PATAR BEACH

☎ 075 / pop 61,000

Bolinao once played a key role in the galleon trade, and there are said to be various sunken Chinese junks and Mexican merchant vessels lying offshore. Today it is a somewhat dull, albeit friendly, provincial town.

If you come out this way, your destination will likely be Patar Beach, a long stretch of narrow sand linking Bolinao with barangay Patar, 18km to the south. It's not great swimming until you make it all the way to Patar centre, where beautiful White Beach, overlooked by the towering Spanish-built Cape Bolinao Lighthouse, awaits you.

Information

The only reliable Internet connection is **Chips & Discs** (A Celino St, Bolinao; per hr P40). There are a couple of banks in town that change dollars, but there are no ATMs.

Sights & Activities

Built by the Augustinians in 1609, the **Church of St James** in the town plaza is notable for its Mexican influence. On its antique altar are two protruding-tongue, Aztec-like statues said to have been brought to Bolinao by early traders. The wooden *santo* (religious statues) on the church's façade are also rare, as many *santo* in the Philippines have been pilfered.

Visitors are welcome at the laboratory of the **University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute** (☎ 554 2755; 11 8am-5pm Mon-Fri; admission free), about 1.5km beyond Bolinao wharf on the road toward Santiago Island. Researchers here have cultivated coral-producing

giant clams and transplanted them to 'clam gardens' in Hundred Islands National Park and off Santiago Island. The institute can arrange snorkelling trips to the gardens, or you can check out the clams and/or local shipwrecks with Cape Bolinao Diving Centre (☎ 554 2658; A Celino St, Bolinao).

Sleeping & Eating

Unless otherwise indicated, rooms do not have hot water.

BOLINAO

El Piscador (☎ 554 2559; s/d P1000/1500; pa) These rooms are the best deal in town, especially the singles, which have attractive dark-wood trim and furniture, and enough space for two people. To find it, follow the main road to past the church and turn left down a marked sidestreet after 200 metres.

Sundowner (☎ 554 4203; d P1500; pa) In addition to being the finest restaurant in Bolinao by a considerable margin, this outdoor seafood eatery on the wharf has two third-floor rooms that are spotless, private and rarely occupied.

Tummy Teasers (☎ 554 4608; A Celino St) and **Short Time** (☎ 554 2984; E de Piero St) deliver cheap eats to the restaurant-free resorts on Patar Beach.

PATAR BEACH

Treasures of Bolinao (☎ 02-375 8884 in Manila; d/cottage/ste P2500/3000/4500; pa) This luxury resort would be unique anywhere, but it truly stands out in this hard-to-reach spot, 17km from Bolinao. The cavernous suites in the main building are honeymoon-ready, with marble floors, ocean views and exquisite furniture. The doubles and the stilted cottages, set around a pool, are more basic, but there's nothing basic about the grounds, which feature a maze of elevated paths that snake over the ocean. The beach down here is powdered-sugar soft.

Bing's Beach Resort (☎ 0921 280 7142; nipa huts P1200, d with air-con P1500; pa) Thirteen kilometres south of Bolinao, this is the best budget place – if only because it's the closest to White Beach in this price range. Bring your own food or order from town.

Also recommended:

Dutch Beach Resort (☎ 0920 732 4376; d with fan/air-con P1500/2000; pa) Good midrange option with attractive rooms. It's 12km south of Bolinao.

Garden Paradise Resort (☎ 02-404 0767 in Manila; d with/without hot water P2500/2000; pa) Nice but overpriced. It's 11km south of Bolinao.

Getting There & Around

Victory Liner, Dagupan Bus and Five Star have several morning buses and a couple of afternoon buses to and from Cubao and Pasay in Manila (P380, seven hours).

There are plenty of minibuses and jeepsneys to Alaminos (P40, 45 minutes).

The dirt road to Patar centre (which starts at A Celino St) is served by infrequent jeepsneys and tricycles (P300 return).

HUNDRED ISLANDS NATIONAL PARK

☎ 075

This small national park off the coast of Alaminos, 35km southeast of Bolinao, actually contains 123 separate islets, although some are just large rocks. Over the centuries the tides have eaten away at the bases of these limestone islands, giving them a distinctive, mushroom-like appearance.

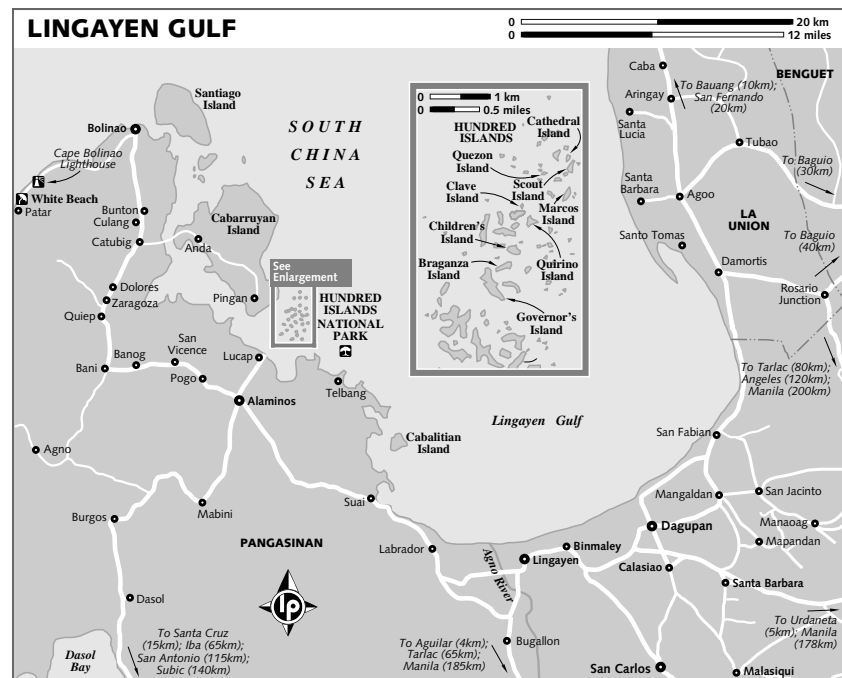
You have to take a boat out to the park's most distant islands to find relatively clear water, but even there the snorkelling isn't terrific, as destructive fishing methods, a few nasty typhoons and El Niño have ruined the park's coral and reduced its marine life.

The Alaminos city government took control of the park in 2005. Speedboats now patrol the park's waters 24/7 in search of illegal fishermen. Meanwhile, the Philippine Tourism Authority (PTA) and the University of the Philippines Marine Science Institute in Bolinao have placed giant clams, some over 1m long, in strategic locations around the islands in an effort to hasten the return of marine life to the area. But it will still take several decades for the coral to recover.

Information

The friendly and useful **Hundred Islands National Park office** (☎ 551 2505; www.alaminocity.gov.ph; h 8am-5pm) is on the wharf in barangay Lucap, the jumping-off point to the national park. The office collects the park entrance fees (P40) and camping fees, and publishes official rates for hiring boats to the islands.

Equitable PCI, BPI (Bank of the Philippine Islands) and Metrobank have ATMs in Alaminos, and there are a couple of Internet cafés.



Sights & Activities

The three most popular islands are Quezon Island, Governor's Island and Children's Island, but you're definitely better off finding your own island on weekends, as these fill up with loads of large families and beach vendors. The beaches on these main islands are nothing special, although Governor's Island has a nice lookout point.

By far the best way to experience the park is in a tandem kayak. Arrange for your boat operator to bring kayaks out to the islands, or rent one on Quezon Island (either way the cost is P250 per hour). You can rent full snorkelling gear (P250 per day) from the Hundred Islands National Park office or from your boat operator. You can snorkel at one of the giant-clam sites but they are hard to find; get directions from the park office.

A welcome new addition to the once-moribund area is the 100 Islands Ocean Sports Centre (☎ 551 2246), on the waterfront in Lucap. The American owner offers parasailing and deep-sea fishing trips, and has plans to rent windsurfers and open a dive centre.

Sleeping & Eating

You can camp anywhere in the national park for P100 to P300, depending on the tent's size. Children's Island has four simple, two-person nipa huts (P650 per hut) with no electricity. Governor's Island has a guesthouse (P2200) that sleeps six to eight and has electricity. Bring your own food and supplies. Make reservations and pay at the Hundred Islands National Park office in Lucap.

Lucap's overpriced, substandard hotels are a major impediment to the area's development. They are all on the same harbour road near the wharf and there is little to distinguish between them.

Vista de las Islas (☎ 551 4455; vistadelasislasyahoo.com; d P1500; pa) This is the most modern place on this strip.

Seaside Haven (☎ 551 2711; nipa huts/d P1300/1500; pa) This spot has a few small, white-clapboard nipa huts over the river at the far end of the strip.

Ted's by the Sea (☎ 551 2160; d P1500; pa) This friendly place has a good location, right on the water.

Hundred Islands Pension House (☎ 551 2505; dm/d/q P250/800/1100; a) This formerly tatty government-run outfit on the wharf is looking better after a renovation in early 2006.

Maxine By The Sea (☎ 551 2537) This popular seafood restaurant over the water is a relaxing place to watch the sunset and snack on tasty fried calamari.

Getting There & Around

From Manila, take any bus to Bolinao (Victory Liner, Dagupan Bus and Five Star have several morning buses and a couple of afternoon buses from Cubao and Pasay) and get off in Alaminos (P330, six hours).

Victory Liner goes to Baguio (P126, 3½ hours, eight per day), and has buses every half hour to Iba (P110, three hours) and Olongapo (P170, five hours) with a bus transfer in Santa Cruz.

It's a 10-minute tricycle ride (P40, 5km) from Alaminos centre to Lucap's hotels.

Hiring a boat from Lucap to Hundred Islands National Park costs P900 return for a 15-passenger boat to the main islands, and P600 return for a five-passenger boat. Island-hopping costs a couple of hundred extra.

LINGAYEN

☎ 075 / pop 89,000

The provincial capital of Pangasinan is best known as the site where US troops came ashore to liberate Luzon in January 1945, thus fulfilling General MacArthur's famous pledge, 'I shall return'. The small open-air Lingayen Gulf War Memorial Museum, on the beachfront near the capital building, pays tribute to the soldiers with pictures of the US landing and other interesting wartime photos. There's also an American fighter plane on display.

Lingayen's coastline comes alive every 1 May with a raucous waterborne parade in celebration of Pista'y Dayat, a fiesta that pays homage to local fishermen. Outside of festival week you'll have little reason to stay overnight here. You're better off continuing on to San Fabian (P40, 1½ hours) by bus or jeepney via Dagupan (P20, 45 minutes).

SAN FABIAN

☎ 075 / pop 66,000

The beaches here are a bit more inviting and have better facilities than those around

Dagupan and Lingayen. Next to the town proper is barangay Nibaliw, where a few resorts flank a wide, grey-sand beach on one side and the small Nibaliw River on the other. The beach at barangay Bolasi, 4km north, is quieter and even wider.

Sleeping & Eating

Sierra Vista Beach Resort (☎ 511 2023; sierravista beachresort@yahoo.com; Nibaliw; d P1750; p a s) This is the last resort on the strip in Nibaliw. Its rooms are far superior to the others here and only slightly more expensive. The grounds and services are also a cut above, and there's a pleasant open-air restaurant that serves elaborate fruity cocktails.

San Fabian PTA Beach Resort (☎ 523 6502; Bolasi; d/cottage P1700/2200; p a s) This elaborate, sprawling compound was once a haunt of Ferdinand Marcos. Everything about it is leviathan – the rooms, the grounds and the extra-wide beach. It has a slightly dated feel.

Lazy 'A' Beach Resort (☎ 511 5014; fax 522 3084; Nibaliw; cottages with fan & cold water P1150, r with air-con & hot water P1600; p s) The rooms here are ordinary but the restaurant has a decent restaurant that serves Mexican and American dishes. Its beach is right next to the hectic public beach.

San Fabian Yacht Club (Nibaliw River; a) This American-style bar-and-grill occupies a pleasant spot on the banks of the Nibaliw River.

Getting There & Around

Five Star has one direct bus per day to and from Pasay, Manila (P382, six hours). Dagupan Bus, Victory Liner and Five Star have regular buses from Manila to nearby Dagupan (P300, 5½ hours), from where it's easy to catch a jeepney or minibus to San Fabian (P20, 30 minutes).

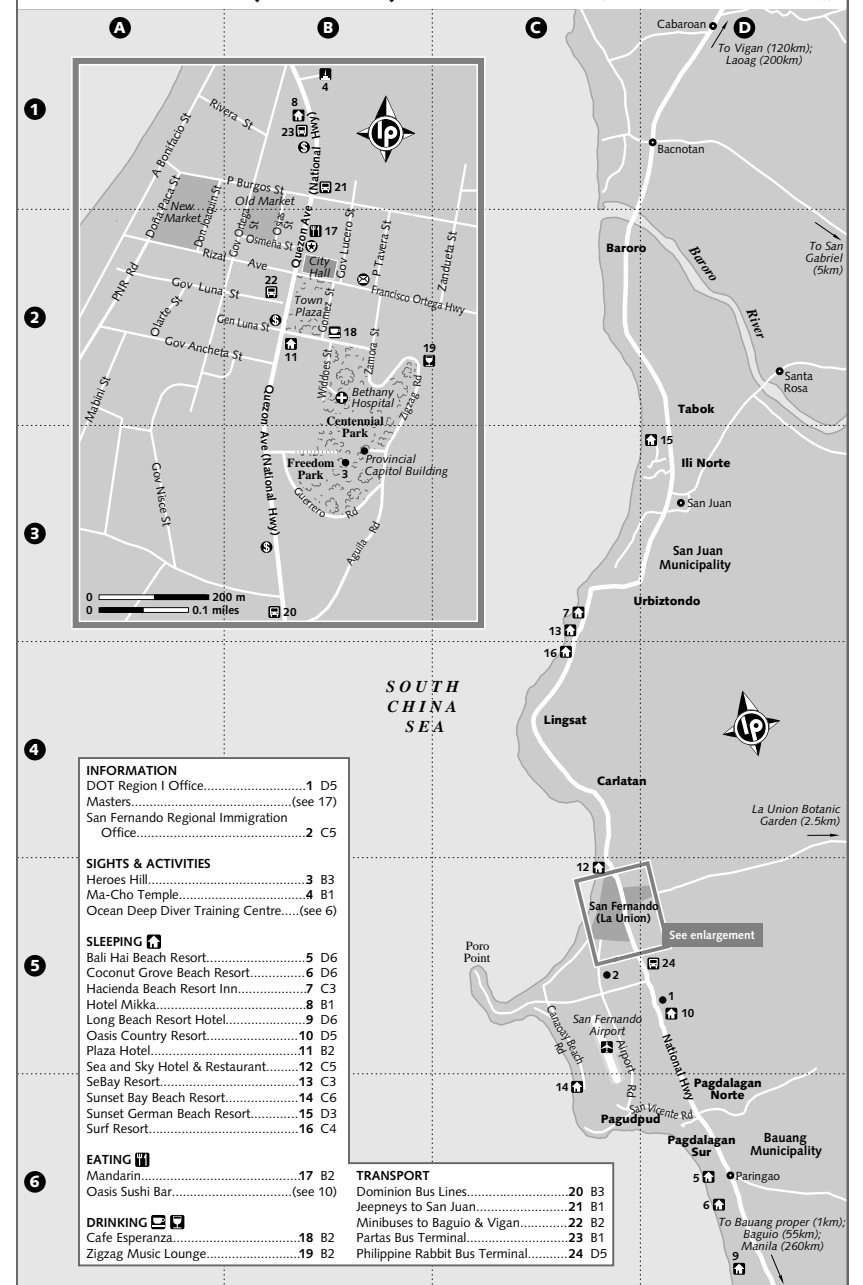
You can get a tricycle to take you from the town centre to the resorts.

SAN FERNANDO (LA UNION) & AROUND

☎ 072 / pop 102,000

The provincial capital of La Union, San Fernando is known for the dozens of beach resorts that dot the coastline north and south of the city. To the south lies Bauang (ba-wahng), which until 1991 was the party destination of choice for US military personnel stationed at nearby Wallace Air Station.

SAN FERNANDO (LA UNION) & AROUND



While Bauang is struggling to hold on to the remnants of its vice-laced heyday, San Juan to the north has carved out a niche as a good place to learn surfing. The surf season is October to March.

Information

Metrobank, Equitable PCI and BPI have branches with ATMs along Quezon Ave. **DOT Region I Office** (Department of Tourism; ☎ 888 2411; National Hwy; 11 8am-5.30pm) Next to Oasis Country Resort.

Masters (☎ 888-3003; Quezon Ave; per hr P25; 11 8am-9pm) One of many Internet cafés in town; above Mandarin restaurant.

Regional immigration office (☎ 888 4515; Royal Bowling Center, Mabini St; 11 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) A quick, painless place to get your visa extended.

Sights & Activities

The striking Taoist and Catholic Chinese **Ma-Cho Temple** sits atop a hill just north of San Fernando. The original image of the Virgin of Caysasay, the patroness of San Fernando's Filipino-Chinese community, is brought to the temple from Taal, Batangas, in the second week of September as part of the week-long activities in celebration of the Feast of the Virgin (a replica is on display for the rest of the year).

Freedom Park, near the provincial Capitol Building, has spectacular views of the city. You can access it via Zigzag Rd or walk the 153 steps up **Heroes Hill**, which is lined with statues of Philippine national heroes and presidents.

The sprawling **La Union Botanic Garden** (admission P15; 11 8am-5pm), 6.5km east of the city, has pavilions and a variety of plant life.

The Ocean Deep Diver Training Center (☎ 888 4440; www.oceandeeep.biz; 1-1/2-tank dive US\$30/60) at Coconut Grove Beach Resort can arrange scuba-diving trips. Fagg Reef is the marquee destination around here.

Sleeping

The beach is much wider and nicer in San Juan. There's more happening in Bauang. The cheapest hotels are in San Fernando. You choose.

SAN FERNANDO

Sea and Sky Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 242 5579; fax 242 3869; Quezon Ave; d P900; p a i s) Spectacular ocean views from the restaurant balcony are on offer here. The basement

rooms are unexpectedly comfortable, and the staff are friendly and helpful.

Oasis Country Resort (☎ 242 5621; www.oasiscountryresort.com; National Hwy; s/d/casitas P2000/2500/2700; p n a i s) This is the most modern and service-oriented hotel in the entire Lingayen Gulf area, with sizable, if standard, doubles and a few poolside *casitas* (little houses). It also has the delicious *Oasis Sushi Bar*. It's 1km south of the city centre.

Sunset Bay Beach Resort (☎ 888 4843; sunsetbayresort@yahoo.com; Barangay Canaaoay; d P1000; p a i s) This is the best of several options on the beach near Poro Point, San Fernando's red-light district. The beach here is wider, quieter and nicer than in Bauang. The rooms are large, clean and good value.

Two perfectly fine but noisy budget options right downtown are **Hotel Mikka** (☎ 242 5737; mikka@sflu.com; Quezon Ave; s/d P675/900; n a) and **Plaza Hotel** (☎ 888 2996; fax 242 5760; Quezon Ave; s with fan P450, d with air-con P750; j).

SAN JUAN

Sunset German Beach Resort (☎ 720 2698; www.sunsetgermanbeach.com; d with fan/air-con P550/750; p) This small, lush resort has a few extremely cosy and attractive rooms with exposed brickwork. It's about 4km north of the main surf break, but the beach here gets waves too and you can rent a surfboard for P60 per hour – a third the price you'll pay elsewhere. To get here take a jeepney bound for Bacnotan from San Fernando (P10, 6km) and a tricycle from the main highway (P15, 2km).

SeBay Resort (☎ 242 5484; www.sebay.cjb.net; d with fan/air-con P550/800; p) Located right on the surf break, this is a popular place to hang out, with a couple of pool tables and dartboards on the ground floor of the Viganesque main lodge. The rooms are basic, but are clean for this neck of the woods.

Surf Resort (☎ 720 0340; d with fan/air-con P550/800; p) Run by Aussie Brian Landrigan, a 20-year veteran of the area, this is surfing HQ. You can rent surfboards (P200 per hour) and buy any other surfing supplies you need. The rooms, however, have seen better days.

Hacienda Beach Resort Inn (☎ 242 1109; d with fan/air-con P500/700; p) A step up from camping, but by no means a giant step.

BAUANG

Long Beach Resort Hotel (☎ 242 0609; lbrh@sflu.com; d with fan/air-con P700/800; p) This place has

plenty going for it: it's the best deal in Bauang. It's on the bigger, better south end of the beach; it's a bit more family-oriented than some of its neighbours; and it serves cold San Miguel in attractive beer huggies. The rooms are sparse but large, and the comfortable beachside restaurant has nightly live music and theme meals like Tuesday pasta night (P175). Oh yeah, and there's also a small store that sells exactly 13 pairs of ugly sneakers.

Bali Hai Beach Resort (☎ 242 5679; www.bali.hai.com.ph; d/cottage incl breakfast P1650/2550; p a i s) The doubles here are basic, so upgrade to one of the nice two-room cottages scattered around the grounds if you can afford it. Although the cottages have kitchens, there's also a great beachfront restaurant that offers German, English and Indonesian specialties.

Coconut Grove Beach Resort (☎ 888 4276; resort@coco.com.ph; d P1200-1700; p a i s) This bungalow-style resort has a large pool, a pleasant Thai-oriented restaurant, lawn bowling and the only dive centre in the area. The deluxe rooms are especially large.

Eating & Drinking

The best places to eat in San Juan and Bauang are the resorts.

Oasis Sushi Bar (☎ 242 5621/28; National Hwy) At the Oasis Country Resort, this yummy restaurant has nightly all-you-can eat buffets from 6pm. Tuesday is Thai night (P345); Friday is a Mongolian buffet (P325).

Mandarin (Quezon Ave; mains P120; a) Head to this spot for good Chinese food in San Fernando.

Café Esperanza (Gomez St; sandwiches under P100) Overlooking the town plaza, this café serves sandwiches, pastries and coffee in a nice relaxed atmosphere.

Zigzag Music Lounge (Zigzag Rd; meals P150, sashimi platter P125; a) This scenic lounge serves Filipino food and sashimi. Beware: the karaoke here is strictly varsity.

There's plenty of entertainment on Pennsylvania Ave out by Poro Point, most of it less than wholesome.

Getting There & Around

Partas (☎ 242 0465; Quezon Ave), **Dominion** (☎ 888 2997; Quezon Ave) and **Philippine Rabbit** (☎ 888 2035; Quezon Ave) have air-con buses to Manila (P350, six hours) at least once an hour.

Partas and **Philippine Rabbit** go north to Laoag (P296, 5½ hours) via Vigan (P190, 3½ hours) regularly until midnight.

Minibuses to Baguio (P65, 1½ hours) and Vigan (P150, 3½ hours) leave frequently from Gov Luna St.

Jeepneys to Bauang and San Juan can be picked up along Quezon Ave (P9).

ILOCOS

VIGAN

☎ 077 / pop 45,000

Spanish-era mansions, cobblestone streets and *kalesa* (horse-drawn carriages) are the hallmarks of historic Vigan. Miraculously spared bombing in WWII, the city is considered the finest surviving example of a Spanish colonial town in Asia. In 1999, Vigan was designated a Unesco World Heritage site.

History

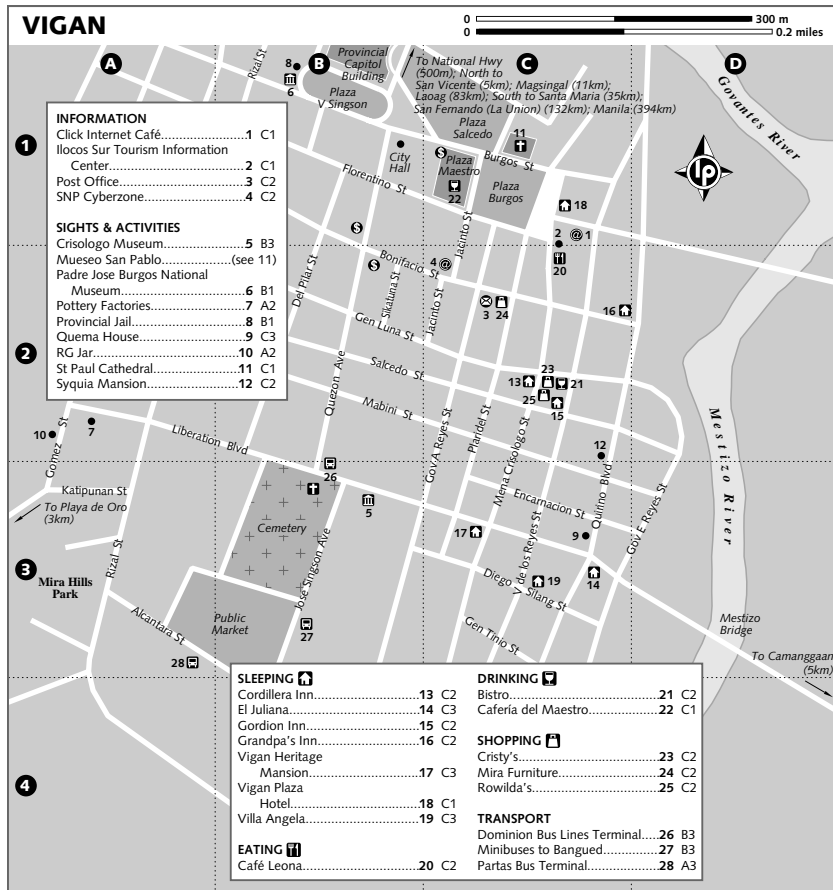
Located near where the Govantes River meets the South China Sea, Vigan became a convenient stop on the Silk Route, which linked Asia, the Middle East and Europe, and a thriving trading post where gold, logs and beeswax were bartered for goods from around the world.

In 1572, Spanish conquistador Juan de Salcedo (grandson of Miguel Lopez de Legazpi, one of the first conquistadors) took possession of the bustling international port. Salcedo became the lieutenant governor of the Ilocos region, and Vigan became the centre of the political, religious and commercial activities of the north. It became a hotbed of dissent against the Spanish when, in 1762, Diego Silang captured Vigan and named it the capital of Free Ilocos. He was eventually assassinated (the Spanish paid a close friend of Silang to shoot him in the back), and his wife, Gabriela Silang, took over. The first woman to lead a revolt in the Philippines, she was eventually captured and publicly hanged in the town square.

The city avoided destruction in WWII when Japanese troops fled the city just ahead of American carpet bombers, who aborted their mission at the last second.

Orientation

Vigan has two main squares located near each other on the north end of town: Plaza



Salcedo, dominated by St Paul Cathedral, and the more lively Plaza Burgos, where locals stroll and hang out.

The Mestizo District is bounded roughly by Plaza Burgos, Gov A Reyes St, Quirino Blvd and Abaya St. Most of the tourist shops are on Mena Crisologo St, which has been immaculately restored and is closed to vehicular traffic, giving it an old-Europe feel.

The main commercial drag is tricycle-congested Quezon Ave, which runs south to the cemetery and the public market.

Information

There's an Equitable PCI bank on Plaza Maestro, but most banks with functioning ATMs are clustered on Quezon Ave.

Click Internet Café (V de los Reyes St; per hr P25; 8am-midnight) Internet access.

Ilocos Sur Tourism Information Center (☎ 722 8520; 1 Mena Crisologo St; 8am-noon & 1-5pm) In the ancestral home of poet Leona Florentino, this is a good source of information on the region. It offers free guided tours of Vigan.

Post Office (cnr Bonifacio St & Gov A Reyes St)

SNP Cyberzone (cnr Bonifacio St & Jacinto St; per hr P25; 8am-midnight) Internet access.

Sights

ST PAUL CATHEDRAL

This church (Burgos St) was built in 'earthquake baroque' style (ie thick-walled and massive) after an earlier incarnation was damaged by two quakes in 1619 and 1627. The con-

struction of the original wooden, thatched church is believed to have been supervised by Salcedo himself in 1574.

MESTIZO DISTRICT

Vigan's old town, popularly known in the past as 'Kasanglayan' ('Where the Chinese Live'), contains the largest concentration of ancestral homes and other colonial-era architecture. The colonial mansions here were built by Chinese merchants who settled, intermarried and, by the 19th century, became the city's elite.

Although generally considered Spanish, the architecture is actually a combination of Mexican and Chinese styles, with Filipino flourishes such as sliding capiz-shell windows. Believe it or not, these elegant structures evolved from the nipa huts popular among indigenous tribes in the Cordillera and elsewhere. The ground floor has stone walls and is strictly for storage and/or work, while the wooden first floor, with its large, airy *sala*, is for living. The capiz-shell windows are as tall as doors, while the wide windowsills are good spots for a siesta. The capiz is a flat bivalve found in the coastal waters of the Philippines. It came into fashion in the 19th century because it was cheaper than glass and sturdy enough to withstand typhoon winds and rain.

While a couple of mansions have been converted into B&Bs or museums, most are private homes. You can knock on the door (note the hand-shaped brass knockers on some doors) and see if the owner will give you a tour, but there's no guarantee. The other option is to call the Tourism Information Center (opposite) a few days in advance and see if the staff can arrange something. Two houses to look out for are the *Quema House* and the *Syquia Mansion* on Quirino Blvd.

MUSEUMS

The Crisologos, Vigan's most prominent political dynasty, have converted their home into a strange but interesting family shrine, the **Crisologo Museum** (Liberation Blvd; admission free; 8.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sat). In addition to the usual fare of books, photos and other personal items, there is the old Chevy that Governor Carmeling Crisologo was in when she was ambushed in 1961. She survived, but her husband, Floro, a longtime congressman, was not so

lucky when he was attacked in a church in 1970. There are a few lurid photos of the killing, and the blood-stained pants he was wearing are preserved in a glass case. The 1st-floor *sala* is kept mostly as it was when it was occupied, and contains several pieces of colonial-era furniture.

The recently opened **Museo San Pablo** (admission P10; 8.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Fri-Wed), in St Paul Cathedral, has a religious theme and is a good place to see old *santos*. The photo collection of a German pharmacist who lived in Vigan for a number of years in the late 1800s also deserves a look.

Built in 1788, the **Padre José Burgos National Museum** (Burgos St; admission P10; 8.30-11.30am & 1.30-4.30pm Tue-Sat) is the ancestral home of Father José Burgos, one of the three martyr priests executed by the Spanish in 1872. It houses an extensive collection of Ilocano artefacts, including a series of 14 paintings by the locally famed painter Don Esteban Villanueva depicting the 1807 Basi Revolt. Weavings, Tingguian (Itneg) jewellery, musical instruments, pottery and farming and fishing implements are also on display. On the 2nd floor is the Ilocano Hall of Fame, with photos and captions describing the achievements of famous Ilocanos. Next door is the provincial jail, built in 1657.

POTTERY FACTORIES

Prior to the arrival of the Spanish, Chinese settlers took advantage of the abundant clay in the area and pioneered a still-active pottery industry. The *burnay* (earthen jars) are used in the fermentation of *basi* (sugarcane wine) and *bagoong* (fish paste), but you are more likely to see them scattered about in homes and gardens. There are a couple of pottery factories you can visit on Liberation Blvd, near the corner of Gomez St. The 50m-long kiln at **RG Jar** (Gomez St), which was made in 1823 and can hold nearly 1000 jars, is a wonder to behold. Kevin the *kalabaw* is employed as a mixer at RG Jar and will periodically walk on the clay.

WEAVERS

Vigan weavers are known for using *abel*, a locally produced cotton fabric, to hand-weave shawls, tablecloths, napkins and even *barong*. **Barangay Camanggaan**, just a 10-minute tricycle ride southeast of Vigan, is a good place to watch *abel* hand-weavers

in action and pick up woven goods at unbeatable prices in designs that are difficult to find elsewhere.

In *barangay Mindoro*, there are still a few weavers making *binakol* weavings that incorporate a traditional psychedelic-looking design.

Festivals & Events

The **Viva Vigan Festival of the Arts**, a grand celebration of the town's cultural heritage, takes place in the first week in May. There is street dancing, a fashion show, a *kalesa* parade and, of course, lots of food.

The **Vigan town fiesta**, held in the third or fourth week of January, commemorates the town's patron saint, St Paul the Apostle, with a parade and musical performances.

Sleeping

All the hotels listed here have free breakfast and hot water unless otherwise noted.

Grandpa's Inn (% 722 2118; 1 Bonifacio St; d with/without air-con P1200/700; p a) This rustic inn has a good restaurant and two rooms where you can sleep in a *kalesa*. The other rooms lack these carriages-cum-beds but still have brick walls, capiz-shell windows and wooden beams. Unfortunately the bathrooms are run-down and street noise can be a problem. The restaurant is a popular late-night watering hole.

Cordillera Inn (% 722 2727; cnr Mena Crisologo St & Gen Luna St; d P1500; p a) You can't beat the location, right in the heart of the Mestizo District. It's a bit worn around the edges but stays true to the Vigan theme with colonial-style beds and furniture, and a grand wooden staircase.

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Villa Angela (% 722 2914; 26 Quirino Blvd; d/q P1600/1800; p a) This B&B is more than 130 years old and retains every morsel of its old-world charm. The massive rooms and fabulous antique furniture, which include wooden harps and king-sized *nara*-wood canopy beds, will blow you away. This is where Tom Cruise, Willem Dafoe and other celebs spent the night while filming *Born on the Fourth of July* in the vicinity in 1989, and there is no shortage of pictures on the wall to prove it.

Gordion Inn (% 722 2526; www.gordioninn.netfirms.com; cnr V de los Reyes & Salcedo St; d P1200; p n a) This B&B is easy to spot with its bright blue-and-yellow façade. The rooms are basic but have Viganesque touches like old four-poster canopy beds, and there is a small outdoor restaurant that serves vegetarian food. Once again, the bathrooms are substandard.

Playa de Oro (% 0916 326 2039; jdplayadeoro@yahoo.com; d with/without TV P700/600; p a) Lest one forget Vigan is near the beach, there's this simple but inoffensive resort on a vast beach just 3km west of town. There's no hot water.

Also recommended:

El Juliana (% 722 2994; 5 Liberation Blvd; d P700; p a s) Has large, basic rooms. Access to the pool costs P40, even for hotel guests. Prices don't include breakfast.

Vigan Heritage Mansion (% 722 6495; www.viganheritage.com; cnr Liberation Blvd & Mena Crisologo St; d P1500; p a) Newly opened historic B&B, but where's the antique furniture?

Vigan Plaza Hotel (% 722 8552; vphotel@pldt.dsl.net; Plaza Burgos; s/d P2000/2500; p n a) Legitimate high-end option boasts modern design with old-world flourishes.

Eating & Drinking

Café Leona (Mena Crisologo St; meals P100-300; a) This eatery is so good there's hardly a need to go anywhere else. It serves excellent Japanese and Ilocano specialties, and offers a different fixed-price, all-you-can-eat menu every day. It stays open late, drawing an eclectic mix of local and foreign travellers in search of libation after a long, hot day of sightseeing. To top it all off, there's outdoor, streetside dining Tuesday through Saturday.

Cafetería del Maestro (Plaza Maestro; a) This American-style coffee shop serves up cold coffee-based drinks and a selection of pastries and cakes.

Bistro (Gen Luna St; h 6pm-midnight) A classy bar with old furniture and Pinoy records on the wall.

The best cheap dining option is the collection of street stalls that line Florentino St along Plaza Burgos, serving tasty local snacks such as *empanadas* (deep-fried flour tortillas filled with shrimp, cabbage and egg) and *okoy* (deep-fried shrimp omelettes).

Shopping

There are several antique shops in the Mestizo District that are fun to browse, but they mostly carry reproductions.

Ornate wooden furniture is produced in Vigan, and shops such as **Mira Furniture** (% 722 2755; cnr Plaridel St & Bonifacio St) take orders for colonial-style custom-made furniture, such as long-armed *butaca* chairs.

Woven *abel* goods can be found in the public market or at **Rowilda's** (Mena Crisologo St) and **Cristy's** (Mena Crisologo St).

Getting There & Away

There are many buses to and from Manila (P550, 10 hours). Try **Dominion Bus Lines** (% 722 2084; cnr Liberation Blvd & Quezon Ave) to Cubao and Sampaloc, or **Partas** (% 722 3369; Alcantara St) to Cubao and Pasay. Partas has two 29-seat deluxe buses (P700); the company also has buses to Laoag (P90, two hours). Philippine Rabbit and other buses bound for Laoag and Manila stop on the National Hwy outside Vigan.

Partas and Philippine Rabbit have several buses per day to Governor Pack Rd in Baguio (P260, five hours).

Any bus heading south stops in San Fernando (La Union; P190, 3½ hours).

There are frequent minibuses to Laoag (P90, two hours) from the Caltex station on the National Hwy, and to Bangued (P60, 1½ hours) from near the public market.

Getting Around

Vigan is one of the few remaining towns in the Philippines where *kalesa* are still in use. The cost of a *kalesa* ride (P10 per head within town) is slightly more than a tricycle ride (P6).

AROUND VIGAN

Worth the one-hour drive south is the **Santa Maria Church**. This Unesco World Heritage site, a massive baroque structure built in 1769, is unique in the region. It has an imposing brick façade and sits alone on a hill overlooking Santa Maria, rather than down in the town square. Accessible by huge flights of stairs on either side, it's not hard to see why it was used as a fortress during the Philippine Revolution in 1896.

Also worth a visit is the architecturally interesting, primitive baroque-style **Church of San Vicente**, just a 15-minute tricycle ride north of Vigan. Chinese and Japanese missionaries were once housed here.

There is a branch of the **National Museum** (admission free; h 7.30am-5pm Mon-Fri) in Magsin-

gal, 11km north of Vigan, where Ilocano relics are on display. An ancient-looking belfry (1731), part of the remains of a ruined old church, still stands in front of the museum. The museum itself was once a convent for the ruined church, which was replaced in 1827 by the nearby **Magsingal Church**, which houses two rather interesting sculptures of pregnant-looking mermaids.

LAOAG

% 077 / pop 95,000

Long before Laoag (*la-wahg*) was established in 1580 with St William the Hermit as its patron saint, Chinese and Japanese merchants visited the area, which was renowned for its gold mines. Laoag eventually became the capital of Ilocos Norte and loyal Marcos country. Imee Marcos, daughter of Ferdinand and Imelda, is a congresswoman here, and her brother Ferdinand R (Bong Bong) Marcos is the current governor. Around Laoag, the old dictator is still referred to somewhat reverently as 'President Marcos'.

There's not a whole lot to do in Laoag itself, although there are some wonderful old churches and good beaches not far from the city. High-rolling tourists from Taiwan flock to nearby Fort Ilocandia Resort & Casino. Watch out – every now and then a busload of them takes over the Museo Ilocos Norte.

Information

The big banks all have branches around the intersection of Gen Segundo and Rizal Ave, Laoag's main commercial thoroughfare.

Gym Carry (Gen Segundo Ave; per hr P30; h 8am-8pm) The best Internet café in town.

PNB (Philippine National Bank; % 772 4027; cnr Tres Marias Ave & Rizal Ave) Near the capital building; exchanges travellers cheques.

Sights

The Italian Renaissance-style **St William's Cathedral** was built in the 1870s, presumably long before the McDonalds that sits right in front of it. Its weathered belltower is gradually sinking into the soft riverside loam; note the low-slung entryway.

Housed in the historic **Tabacalera** warehouse, the snazzy new **Museo Ilocos Norte** (% 770 4587; Gen Luna St; admission P20; h 9am-5pm Tue-Sat & 9am-noon Mon) has a large collection of Ilocano, Igorot and Itneg cultural artefacts.

same legacy that prompts many Filipinos to suspect the body is simply a wax figure, one last-ditch con.

To get to Batac from Laoag, take a jeepney (P15, 45 minutes, 15km) or tricycle (P100), or hop on any southbound bus.

Paoay

From Batac it's just 4km west to Paoay (pow-why), home of North Luzon's most famous church. Paoay Church was built in classic 'earthquake baroque' style, with massive brick reinforcements running along its sides. Its walls are made of thick coral blocks and stucco-plastered bricks, sealed with a mixture of limestone mortar and sugarcane juice. Begun in 1704 and finished 90 years later, it has Gothic, Chinese and Japanese influences. Unlike other beautiful churches of the region, Paoay Church is not encroached upon by shops, schools or food stalls. Along with its towering belfry, it stands in a wide-open square, revealed in all its splendour and glory. Unesco named it a World Heritage site in 1993.

Heading back north to Laoag via the coastal route takes one through Suba, home to scenic Paoay Lake and Malacañang of the North (admission P20; 10 9-11.30am & 1-4pm Tue-Sun), the opulent former residence of the Marcos family. The impressive house, with its cavernous sala, capiz-shell windows and other colonial touches, provides a glimpse into the family's lavish lifestyle.

Paoay-bound jeepneys leave from near the RCJ terminal on Hernando Ave (P25, 17km), or you can take a tricycle (P130). Malacañang of the North is a 30-minute tricycle ride from Paoay (P50). To get there from Laoag, take a Suba-bound jeepney (P15, 12km) from near St William Church, or a tricycle (P100).

PAGUDPUD

☎ 077 / pop 19,300

Filipinos call Pagudpud the 'Boracay of the North', but that's a bit of a misnomer. While it does have gorgeous white beaches backed by rows of palms, it's missing one essential Boracay component: people.

Pagudpud actually consists of three vast beaches, strung along Luzon's northern edge and hemmed in by huge points jutting out into the ocean. Coconut palm-backed Saud beach is where the resorts are. Maira-Ira,

also known as Blue Lagoon, is a few points east. Deserted Pansian beach is still further on, near the border of Cagayan province.

In Maira-Ira, Luzon's whitest sand and bluest water conspire majestically to be situated in one place. It's also a good snorkelling and dive spot. It's 16km from Saud to the beach turn-off, then another 4km down a bumpy road; you can take a tricycle from Saud (return P300, 45 minutes).

About 30km to the west of Pagudpud is the impressive Cape Bojeador Lighthouse and, closer by, are the windmills of beautiful Bangui Bay.

The beaches around here don't have much in the way of services or beach toys. Hang-and-do-nothing types will find Pagudpud a hidden paradise; hardcore parties will find it an utter bore.

Sleeping & Eating

These resorts are all at Saud Beach.

Terra Rika Beach Resort (☎ 09189371752; terrarika-diveresort@yahoo.com; camp site per adult P50, r P2000; p a), **Apo Idon** (☎ 0918 933 4464; r/cottage P3000/5000; p a s) and **Northridge Resort** (☎ 0920 220 5089; r P1500; p a) are sister resorts clustered at the west end of Saud Beach. The rates at all these places seem high but are negotiable, especially in the low season. The nicest is Apo Idon, which has four very appealing rooms with stone walls and good lighting. Terra Rika rents tents with mattresses for P300; it also has a small dive centre. Order your meals in advance at the Terra Rika restaurant, which serves excellent fresh seafood, including lobster.

Saud Beach Resort (☎ 02-928 9853 in Manila; d/ste P3300/4000; p a) is an upmarket choice located on a coconut plantation. The sizable rooms have nice wooden floors and bamboo furniture. Enter from the beach or the guard will harass you for P50.

At **Villa Del Mar** (☎ 0920 553 4161; camp site per person P100, r with fan/air-con P1400/1700, cottages P2000-3500; a s) the poolside standard rooms are basic but the deluxe cottages, with stone floors and capiz-shell windows, are loaded with charm. You can rent tents for P800.

Getting There & Away

The highway around here is spectacular in spots. If you're travelling by bus from Laoag, get a seat on the left side of the bus.

There are frequent minibuses travelling to Laoag (P60, 1½ hours) and Claveria (P40, 1½ hours).

THE CORDILLERA

To many travellers, North Luzon simply is the Cordillera, with everything else fading into insignificance. These spiny mountains, which top out at 2900m, are beloved, worshipped and feared in equal doses by those who witness them and those who live among them.

The people of the Cordillera, collectively known as the Igorot, own a fascinating culture that is reflected in the area's varied and multitudinous attractions. Banaue's renowned rice terraces have been dubbed 'the eighth wonder of the world', and they thoroughly deserve the label. Lesser-known but no less spectacular terraces exist throughout Ifugao, Mountain Province and Kalinga. So little has changed in Sagada since its days as a hippy hang-out that it would certainly become one again if there were another '60s. Bontoc is a busy mountain town; Kabayan has mummies in mountain caves; Kalinga has a few old head-hunters hanging around. Even Baguio, often maligned, is a fine stop-over for a day or two.

The allure of the Cordillera is confirmed by the following fact: outside of Baguio, there are no ATMs that accept Western plastic in the entire region. Bring cash,

but not too much because you'll only need about P500 a day.

BAGUIO

☎ 074 / pop 252,300

Vibrant, woody and cool by Philippine standards, Baguio (*bah-gee-oh*) is the undisputed nerve centre of the Cordillera. For Filipinos, it's the escape of choice from the stifling heat of the lowlands. For foreigners, it's the primary gateway to backpacker bliss up north in Sagada, Banaue and Kalinga.

The city was constructed as a mountain retreat by US military forces in the early 1900s. WWII in the Philippines began when the Japanese bombed Baguio's Camp John Hay, which later served as General Tomoyuki Yamashita's headquarters. The city was subsequently flattened by US bombs dropped to drive out the Japanese – who had already left. It was levelled again by a massive earthquake in 1990.

The bombs are long gone but today the city's residents are faced with a new threat: overdevelopment. The local press repeatedly lambast city planners for inviting environmental destruction, while longtime Baguio dwellers wax nostalgic about the days before SM Mall marred every view and traffic clogged every street.

The area's original inhabitants, the Ibaloi and Kankanaey, long ago assimilated into Baguio society. The city's character is now shaped by the quarter of a million college students that double Baguio's population

TEN WORDS FOR THE ROAD IN THE CORDILLERA

Begnas A traditional Kankanaey community celebration held to mark planting season, death and various other events. Also known as a *pakde*.

Bodong A peace pact, essentially. The signing of a *bodong* is usually followed by a *cañao*.

Cañao A ritual feast, usually involving the sacrifice of livestock, to mark certain stages in the rice-growing season and just about anything else imaginable.

Dap-ay The ubiquitous outdoor patio where important Igorot meetings and rituals take place. In some tribes, only men are allowed to enter the *dap-ay*. In the Bontoc area, *dap-ay* are called *ato*.

Gansa Gongs used in a *begnas* or *cañao*. A proper *gansa* handle contains the cheek and chin bones of a head-hunting victim.

G-string The common name ascribed to the thonglike woven garment traditionally worn by men throughout the Cordillera.

Mumbaki Akin to a priest, *mumbaki* communicate with the spirits through the innards of freshly sacrificed animals during *cañao*. Known in some tribes as a *mambunong*.

Pinikpikan A popular chicken dish in which the bird is first beaten alive, so its blood coagulates, then killed.

Tapis Beautiful woven wraparound skirts worn by women.

Tengao Days of rest in the Bontoc region, called by village elders. *Tengao* are known as *obaya* in Sagada.

BAGUIO

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NORTH LUZON

NORTH LUZON

Mon-Sat) on the campus of St Louis University is run by Ike Picpican, one of the country's foremost authorities on the history and culture of the Cordillera people. It's located in the basement of the campus library.

CAMP JOHN HAY

Formerly a US military rest-and-recreation facility, 246-hectare **Camp John Hay** (☎ 442 7902) has been reinvented as a mountain resort with restaurants, hotels, shops and a fantastic golf course sprinkled amid rolling hills and stands of Benguet pines. Worth a visit is the **Historical Core**, with the attractively landscaped **Bell Amphitheatre**. Just across from here is the **Cemetery of Negativism**, where strange epitaphs are engraved on mock headstones (eg **Knot A Teemplayer, Born a Star, Lived a Meteor, Died in Flames**). Nearby is a historic walking trail and the unique **Chocolat de Batriol** restaurant. There's a nice panorama from the **Mile High viewpoint**; the **Butterfly Sanctuary** is also worth a look.

It's free to enter the camp, although modest admission fees apply to some sights. The golf course is private but serious golfers shouldn't have a problem talking their way on through the manager.

MT SANTO TOMAS

The highest peak around Baguio, 2200m Mt Santo Tomas, just south of the city off the Marcos Highway, affords good mountain-biking and hiking opportunities. It's a two-hour walk to the top from the trailhead. Get a guide at the DOT.

BALATOC MINES TOUR

At this abandoned mine (☎ 447 2619; office in SM Mall; tour P250; h last tour at 2.30pm), you can don helmet and headlamp, board an underground train and pretend you're a miner. To get there take an Acupan-Balatoc jeepney from Harrison Rd near the Burnham Hotel (P17.50, 30 minutes).

Sleeping

Lodging options south and east of the city centre are universally quieter and more woody than hotels elsewhere.

BUDGET

Red Lion (☎ 304 3078; 92 Upper Gen Luna Rd; d P800; p i) The main draw of this popular choice is its bar, which serves great steaks

and is the preferred watering hole for Baguio's expat community. The basement rooms are dark but sizable.

There are sundry dorm beds available in town, most of them perfectly grim. One exception is the colourful and clean **Diamond Inn** (☎ 443 8575; www.diamond-inn.com; E Jacinto St; dm/d P280/650). **Baguio Harrison Inn** (☎ 442 7803; 37 Harrison Rd; s/d P400/590) in the YWCA building has small singles for dorm-bed prices. **Benguet Pine Tourist Inn** (☎ 442 7325; fax 443 3109; 82 Shanum St; dm/d P300/800; p) is a quiet option near the buses to Sagada.

MIDRANGE

Citylight Hotel (☎ 444 7544; fax 444 7422; 245 Upper Gen Luna Rd; s/d with shared bathroom P450/900; p) The singles are shoeboxes, but they're clean, cosy, perfectly functional shoeboxes. It's only a five-minute walk from Session Rd, and the Studio Café attracts a chic weekend crowd.

Iggy's (☎ 444 7146; South Dr; d P950; p) Probably the best value in Baguio if you like doing the rustic thing. It's a way out of town but has plenty of upsides: peace and quiet, a decent view, a good restaurant and local art everywhere – including in the rooms.

Burnham Hotel (☎ 442 2331; fax 442 8415; 21 Calderon St; d P1000; p) This warm, old-fashioned hotel in the city centre has a wonderful common area festooned with indigenous handicrafts, antiques and old photos. The rooms are also attractively decorated, but request one away from the noisy street.

La Brea Inn (☎ 446 6061; la_brea_inn@yahoo.com; 24 Session Rd; d P1000) This spick-and-span, no-frills option manages to seal the noise off better than most hotels in the centre.

Bloomfield Hotel (☎ 446 9112; bloomfieldhotel_baguio@yahoo.com; 3 Leonard Wood Rd; d/ste P1500/2000; p n a) This snazzy new place near SM Mall has tastefully austere rooms with inviting, duvet-covered beds. The suites, with king-sized beds, are worth the splurge. It's a bit noisy, however.

Also recommended:

Mountain Lodge (☎ 442 4544; mlodge@skynet.net; 27 Leonard Wood Rd; s/d P1200/1500; p) More country inn than mountain lodge, but there's nothing wrong with that.

Wood's Place Inn (☎ 442 4641; woodsinn@mozcom.com; 38 Military Cut Off Rd; d P1200; p) Great location outside the centre, large rooms and a spa on the premises.

Pines View (☎ 446 6726; fax 446 9287; 24 Legarda Rd; s/d P1500/2300; p i) New business-class hotel.

TOP END

Ridgewood (☎ 446 6295; fax 446 7733; 17 J Felipe St; d/ste 2000/3000; p n i) This newly constructed wood-and-brick-themed lodge out by Wright Park offers top-end conveniences at good prices. If you don't mind being away from the city centre – and in Baguio you shouldn't – you'll enjoy this refreshingly quiet gem, which boasts touches like duvet covers, twice-per-day maid service and wi-fi.

PNKY (☎ 444 5418; 13 Leonard Wood Rd; d P2500; p) This B&B has a gorgeous common room decorated with items for sale from the art-and-handicraft store downstairs. There are only three rooms, all super stylish; on less busy weekdays you might get the common room to yourself and have free rein with the stereo and board games.

Manor (☎ 845 0822; www.campjohnhayhotels.com; Camp John Hay; d/ste P4000/6000; p n i) Baguio's fanciest hotel has gotten some competition of late but its superior service and mountainside location amid peaceful Camp John Hay make it the surest top-end option. It has a spa, gym, superb restaurant, immaculate rooms and everything else you would expect from a high-class hotel except, perhaps, character. The hotel runs a regular shuttle into town (P150, 10 minutes).

Also recommended:

Villa Princess Theresa Inn (☎ 442 6946; fax 442 7368; 221 Upper Session Rd; d P1800; p) Classy joint adorned with hip furniture from neighbouring Teresita's.

Golden Pine Hotel & Restaurant (☎ 444 9965; goldenpinehotel@skynet.net; cnr Legarda Rd & Cariño St; d P2000; p n a i) Has the standard high-class-hotel luxuries and amenities.

Eating

Café by the Ruins (☎ 442 4010; 25 Chuntug St; meals P150) Baguio's most beloved restaurant is in the remains of the former residence of the governor of Benguet. Near Rizal Park, it's an especially nice place for tea or breakfast. Try the *chocolate-eh at suman* (hot chocolate and sticky-rice cake).

Bliss Café (☎ 442 4641; 38 Military Cut Off Rd; meals P125; h lunch & dinner Tue-Sun, plus breakfast Sat & Sun; n) There's incense in the air and Buddhas on the tables at this earthy vegetarian restaurant next to Wood's Place Inn. The home-made pasta dishes are especially tasty.

Kusima ni Ima Restaurant (☎ 443 9420; cnr Legarda Rd & Cariño St; meals P125) This downhome

THE AUTHOR'S CHOICE

Forest House (☎ 447 0459; 16 Loakan Rd; sandwiches P85, mains P250-300; n) No detail is left unattended at this hillside eatery with a cabin-in-the-woods feel. The comfortable seating area by the fireplace, with a full complement of daily newspapers, is a fine place to wait out a thunderstorm. The eclectic menu includes Thai, Korean and American dishes as well as daring house specialties like Ilocano pork belly (P950, feeds two to three). The view from the balcony is outstanding.

place whips up exotic Kapangpangan specialties like sweet-and-sour *kalabaw*, frogs stuffed with chicken and pork, frog *adobo* (frogs marinated with vinegar and garlic, and stewed until tender) and *camaru* (crickets *adobo* deep-fried with garlic).

O'Mai Khan (☎ 442 5885; 12 Otek St; all-you-can-eat meals P175; n) The best of several all-you-can-eat Mongolian barbecues in town.

My Diner (☎ 446 5862; 88 Abanao St; meals P100; h 8am-2pm) A classic '50s-style diner with waitresses on roller skates, Elvis photos on the wall, and reliable late-night eats and greasy breakfast food.

Don Henrico's (☎ 442 8802; Session Rd; pizza wraps P110). Its pizza is good; its pizza wraps are better.

Drinking

Nevada Square (off Military Circle, Loakan Rd) This innocuous-looking collection of bars and clubs turns into one giant fraternity party on weekends, complete with shots, bar sports and inebriated Filipino co-eds dancing on tabletops until the wee hours. If you're looking to party, this is the place to be. Beware: it can be quiet during the week and a couple of the clubs have dress codes.

Padi's Point Bar & Restaurant (☎ 446 5937; Rizal Park; admission P25-50; h 7pm-4am) This large live-music club draws big R&B, jazz and hip-hop acts from around the country.

Gimbal's (☎ 443 9421; cnr Legarda Rd & Cariño St; admission free) This musty, seedy live-music venue in the Mount Crest Hotel has seen better days, but you can't beat the P20 San Miguel from 6pm to midnight.

JamCafé (cnr Assumption Rd & Session Rd; h 8am-late) A mix of arty-farty types and college students

bask amid local art and solid '80s and '90s tunes in this second-storey lounge.

Rumours (☎ 442 8153; Session Rd) A mellow, sophisticated place that draws its fair share of tourists and expats.

Ionic Café (☎ 444 7480; Session Rd) A smoky, dimly lit place where you can drink a beer in peace.

Shopping

Baguio is a shopping mecca known for woodcarvings, traditional weavings, baskets, silver, and temperate fruits and veggies like strawberries and cabbages.

Various hotels and boutiques in town hawk Ifugao *bulol* (rice god) woodcarvings and rataan-laced baskets, but you can save up to 50% by buying such items wholesale in one of the many workshops that line Asin Road, 7km west of the city centre. There you can also watch Ifugao craftsmen doing their thing. Take the Asin Rd jeepney from Kayang St (P15). In Baguio, **Teresita's** (Main Shop ☎ 442 3376; 90 Upper Gen Luna Rd; Show-room ☎ 442 6946; 221 Upper Session Rd) and **Sabado's** (☎ 442 7102; 16 Outlook Dr) sell similar carvings, as well as antiques and fine local artwork.

For genuine Igorot weavings and garments, **Narda's** (☎ 442 2992; 151 Upper Session Rd; 11am-7pm) and **Easter Weaving Room** (☎ 442 4972; estrwvng@skynet.net; 2 Easter School Rd) each carry a broad selection of high-quality, locally made items. Easter Weaving Room sells everything from hand-woven bookmarks to *tapis*. It's well organised and prices are clearly marked. In the basement factory you can watch women hard at work on their looms.

Mines View Park (Upper Outlook Drive) has rows of souvenir stands where you can find jam, peanut brittle and various other edibles and knick-knacks. A short walk from the park is the **Good Shepherd Convent** (Upper Outlook Drive), where sales of the convent's famous *ubi* (purple yam) jam and other preserves go toward advocacy programmes for single mothers. While you're up here take in the impressive view from Mines View Park's lookout. You'll be hard pressed to spot any mines, but a few small rice terraces are visible on the steep slopes across the valley. To get here take a Plaza-Mines View jeepney from Otek St.

There are several silver shops in town, the best being **Ibay's Silver Shop** (☎ 444 2652; cnr Session Rd & Assumption Rd) and **Pilak** (☎ 442 5971;

37 Leonard Wood Rd). Both also have outlets at Mines View Park.

Baguio's **city market** (Magsaysay Ave) is a 3-sq-km maze where vendors sell everything from lettuce to live poultry to low-quality crafts and souvenirs. Be prepared to haggle. La Trinidad's wholesale market, which serves as a clearing house for almost all the produce grown in the Cordilleras, is also worth a wander.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Asian Spirit (☎ 304 2813, 02 855 3333 in Manila; Azo-tea Bldg, Session Rd) flies daily to Baguio from Manila at 9.45am, returning to Manila at 11.05am (one way P2866).

BUS & CAR

There are three main roads out of Baguio: the Marcos Hwy, which ends up in Agoo and is the main bus route to Manila; Kennan Rd, the shortest route to Manila, which is only open to light vehicles; and Naguilian Rd, which terminates in Bauang. The winding, perilous Halsema Hwy heads north to Bontoc and has been known to fray the nerves of the most seasoned traveller – don't look down!

VictoryLiner (☎ 619 0000), **Dagupan Bus** (☎ 442 5391), **Philippine Rabbit** (☎ 097 302 1104) and **Partas** (☎ 444 8431) have frequent services to and from Cubao, Pasay and Sampaloc stations in Manila (P350, six hours). All depart from Governor Pack Rd except Victory Liner, which has a new, ultramodern terminal off Upper Session Rd. Victory Liner accepts credit cards.

GL Lizardo (☎ 309 2096) has nine trips a day to Sagada (P220, seven hours) from the Dangwa terminal. **D'Rising Sun** (☎ 300 4362), based at the bus terminal on Slaughterhouse Rd, has buses to Bontoc (P212, seven hours, hourly from 5am to 4pm). Both routes go along the Halsema Hwy. Also at the Slaughterhouse Rd terminal you'll find Norton Trans, which services Kabayan (P125, six hours, four daily morning buses). Be prepared for a bumpy, dusty and sometimes frightening ride.

Ohayami (☎ 0920 637 5188) and **KMS** (☎ 0921 206 0531) go to Banaue along the paved southern route (via Solano), departing from the parkview station on Shanum St (P365, nine hours, four daily).

Philippine Rabbit and **Partas** have several buses per day from Governor Pack Rd to Laoag (P360, seven hours) via Vigan (P260, five hours) and San Fernando (La Union; P70, 1½ hours). Minibuses to San Fernando also leave frequently from the Plaza jeepney area near Rizal Park.

KABAYAN

pop 1277

Nestled amid dramatic, rice-terraced slabs of mountain terrain and watched over by its world-famous mummies, Kabayan remains a virtually untouched jewel.

If mummies aren't your thing, Kabayan is a nice place to hike, stargaze, breathe in exhaust-free air and marvel at the voluntary 7pm curfew. Kabayan is also the centre of Ibaloi culture, and many Ibaloi traditions and animistic beliefs linger, especially in the surrounding hills. The area is also known for strong Arabica coffee and tasty *kintoman* (red rice).

Information

The tourism department at the Municipal Hall can set you up with guides to climb Mt Pulag or visit the mummy caves. Kenneth Kelcho, who works at the Municipal Hall, is an excellent guide and a fountain of information about the Ibaloi.

Sights & Activities

You get a good overview of the history and culture of the region at the pint-sized **Kabayan National Museum** (☎ 0908 603 0594; donation suggested; 11am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri), 500m west of town. Two mummies are on display, along with ritual artefacts of the Ibaloi, Kankanay and Ikalahan. The friendly curator, Juliet Igloso, will open the museum outside official opening hours.

MEETING MUMMY

The centuries-old mummification procedure used in Kabayan is different from that of the nine other cultures that have practised mummification worldwide, because the internal organs were not touched. The corpses were dried using the heat and smoke of a small fire, then meticulously bathed in herbal preservatives. Tobacco smoke was periodically blown into the abdominal cavities to drive out worms and preserve the organs. The whole process took up to six months. Kabayan mummification was ended by the Spanish.

The mummies have been frequently stolen and vandalised over the years, so the main caves are now under lock and key. Locals customarily make offerings of gin and *pinikpikan* before entering the caves. Visiting without an Ibaloi guide is a cultural taboo and risks angering the spirits.

There are two main sites where you can see mummies. The most interesting – and most difficult to reach – is the **Timbac Caves** (admission free), five hours from town by foot or 2½ hours by private jeepney. The mummies here, believed to be at least 700 years old, are extremely well preserved. There are about 30 mummies in the two main caves, but the forest around Timbac is said to hide dozens more caves that only Ibaloi elders can locate. Before visiting, get the gate keys from the museum or you'll be sorely disappointed.

There are more accessible caves near *sitio* **Bangao** in the foothills of Mt Tabayoc (2812m), 7km north of Kabayan. The most interesting is the **Pongasan cave** (admission free), a half-hour climb straight up from Bangao, where you'll find five coffins with mummies. The mummies here are not as well preserved as those at Timbac.

About 3km north of Kabayan is the turn-off to **Tinongchol Burial Rock** (admission free), where several coffins are housed; it's also accessible via a footpath that starts behind the National Museum. A short walk south of town is the **Opdas Mass Burial Cave** (admission P20), containing hundreds of skulls and bones between 500 and 1000 years old.

Sleeping & Eating

The quaint **Coop Lodge** (dm P150; ☎) on the main road has half-a-dozen two-bed dorm rooms with shiny wooden walls. When that's full the Municipal Hall makes its dorm rooms (P150) available.

A few of the stores along the main road serve chicken and rice with whatever vegetable is in season.

Shopping

Kabayan Weaving sells shoulder bags and other items woven in unique Ibaloi style.

Getting There & Away

Norton Trans has four morning buses to and from Baguio (P125, six hours) via Ambuklao.

The road north to Abatan makes the Halsema Hwy look like an autobahn. It's truly breathtaking but you'll need a good 4WD with high clearance. You can negotiate a private jeepney to Buguias (20km), then hop on a public jeepney for the final leg to Abatan (P25, 15km).

For a more adventurous escape, hike to Timbac Caves with a guide and the keys to the cave gates; from there it's only a two-hour walk to the Halsema Hwy, where you can flag down one of the many buses going south to Baguio or north to Bontoc or Sagada.

AROUND KABAYAN Mt Pulag National Park

Mt Pulag (2922m), considered sacred ground to the Ibaloi and Kalanguya, is the second-highest peak in the Philippines and anchors the Cordillera's largest national park. The Protected Areas Office (PAO: 0919 631 5402; www.pawb.gov.ph/mt_pulag/pulagvik.htm) in Ambangeg, 1½ hours south of Kabayan, doubles as the park's visitors centre. There's a hefty P750 entrance fee for nonresidents, or P100 for residents, payable here or at other points of entry.

From the visitors centre a rough road climbs 12km to the start of the Grassland Trail near the Department of Environment & Natural Resources (DENR) ranger station, where you must hire a guide (P500) to navigate the final 3½ hours to the summit. About halfway to the summit is the 'grassland' camp site (P50).

A more interesting two- to three-day hike is the Akiki Trail – also known as the 'killer

trail' – which starts 2km south of Kabayan in Duacan, a barangay of Todiakap. From the trailhead it's two hours to Eddet River and another six hours to the 'cow country' camping site. You can camp there or continue on another four hours and camp at the 'saddle grassland' campsite. It's just 30 minutes from there to the summit, which is closed to campers. A guide for this route costs P1800.

There are still-longer routes up Mt Pulag that take you around the back of the mountain through Tawangan or Lusod, home of the Kalanguya. Call the PAO or ask guides in Kabayan for details. Visibility is best in March and April, and the area sees regular, heavy downpours July to September.

To get to the visitors centre jump off the Norton Trans Baguio–Kabayan bus in Ambangeg; there are four morning buses daily.

SAGADA

pop 1350

The absence of noise and pollution are probably the first things you'll appreciate about Sagada, a tranquil mountaintop town where you can walk down the middle of the road and only occasionally be disturbed by a passing vehicle. Backpackers have been flocking here for years to enjoy the incredible mountain scenery, cheap dope and companionship of like-minded travellers.

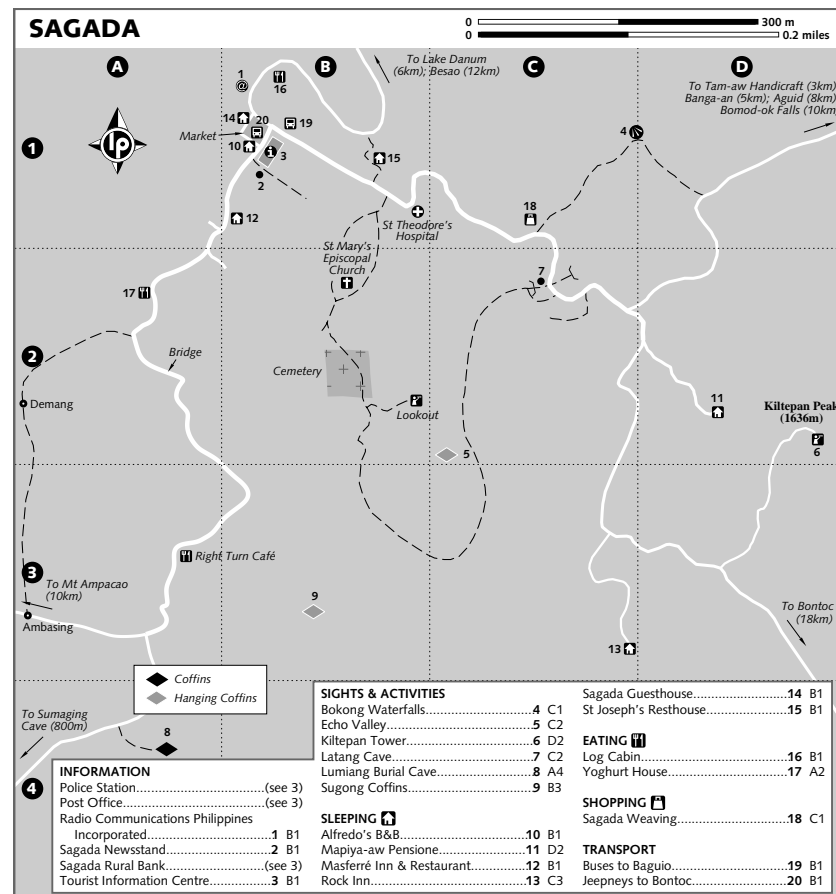
Sagada fills up quickly in the March-to-May high season. But despite its popularity it manages to stave off changes that would detract from its appeal as an 'ecotourism' destination – there are no massive hotels or blaring discos, and videoke is conspicuously absent. For many Sagadans, the traditional way of life remains intact. During harvest

VISITING THE MOUNTAIN TRIBES

While visiting the mountain people of the Cordillera is extremely rewarding, you should consider that your presence can have a destabilising and corrosive influence on their culture. Parts of the Cordillera are still very conservative and you should watch your behaviour.

Obvious displays of wealth are a no-no. Gifts are warmly received but should be kept modest; matches and small bottles of *ginebra* (gin) work well. When photographing people, keep in mind that some tribespeople in particular may be superstitious about your camera or suspicious of your motives. Always respect the wishes of the locals. Ask permission to photograph, and don't insist or snap a picture anyway if permission is denied.

Most importantly, keep in mind that your visit may be brief, but the impressions you make will last a lifetime. Treat those you meet politely and with respect and you can't go wrong.



celebrations, women wear *tapis* while older men don G-strings and gather in the *dapay*; chickens are sacrificed, gongs are played and general merriment ensues.

Sagadans are of Applai (Northern Kankanaey) ancestry and their native language is Kankanaey although, as in the rest of the Cordilleras, Ilocano and English are widely spoken.

It can get chilly at night, especially from December to February, when temperatures can drop as low as 4°C. From March to May, temperatures rise as high as 30°C during the day. The rest of the year is the wet season, when the normal pattern is a sunny, pleasant morning followed by a heavy, long afternoon shower.

Information

The Tourist Information Center in the municipal building is the dispatch centre for all guides in Sagada. The fixed rates are reasonable and the system effectively keeps overzealous freelance guides off the streets. The taciturn guides rarely volunteer information, but they know the area inside and out and will answer questions if you ask them.

Guide rates (P400 for caving, P600 to the Big Waterfall, P400 to Echo Valley) and private jeepney rates (Mt Kiltepan/Banga-an return P500/300) rates are clearly posted at the information centre.

Downstairs from the information centre are the post office and Sagada Rural Bank

(h 8-11.45am & 1.15-4.45pm Tue-Sat). The bank changes cash and travellers cheques at very poor rates. There is also a police station in the building.

Across from the municipal building is the **Sagada Newsstand**, which sells all the big domestic newspapers. Both Sagada Newsstand and Yoghurt House (opposite) lend books in English.

Radio Communications Philippines Incorporated (per hr P60; h 8am-9pm) has Internet access but the connection is often down.

Sights & Activities

CAVES

On the road to Ambasing, just before the Right Turn Café, you can see the **Sugong coffins** suspended from the cliff face. A short distance further is a paved road going off to your left; follow it for 250m and you'll see a path to your left that leads down to the **Lumiang Burial Cave**. Over 100 coffins are stacked in the entrance, the oldest believed to be about 500 years old.

Nine hundred metres further down the road a path leads to the exhilarating **Sumaging Cave** (Big Cave). The further into the cave you go, the more wet you get and the more invigorating and thrilling the cave becomes. You'll need a guide for the full tour, which takes 2½ hours (the guide provides a gas lantern). Muddy and slippery rocks make the initial descent in Sumaging Cave tricky; you should take your shoes off when you reach the smooth limestone and calcium formations. It looks slick, but bare feet have remarkably good grip.

The king of Sagada's cave adventures, suitable for the reasonably fit, is the cave-to-cave connection, an underground passage that links Sumaging and Lumiang caves. You can start the four- to five-hour journey on either side. A guide is mandatory.

HIKING

Sagada has a wealth of top-notch hikes to choose from. As in most of the Cordillera, your guide will be wearing flip-flops no matter how rough the terrain. Do *not* use him as a role model.

Most of Sagada's famous hanging coffins are high on the limestone cliffs surrounding **Echo Valley**. Unlike the coffins in Kabayan, which contain mummies and were entombed centuries ago, these coffins

contain only bones. Some hanging coffins are centuries old; others were put there in the last 40 years. Animistic Applai elders continue to be entombed in the caves surrounding Sagada – if they can afford it. The gods demand the sacrifice of more than 20 pigs and three times as many chickens for the privilege of being buried in the caves.

There are many intersecting paths through the Echo Valley and it's tricky to figure out which way to go. Many people head out for a stroll and return hours later covered in mud, picking leaves and thorns out of their hair. Do the sensible thing and take a guide. The one-hour loop starts in the town cemetery behind St Mary's Episcopal Church, and ends with an optional 10-minute walk through **Latang Cave**, an underground river that spits you out near the Rocky Valley Inn & Café, from where it's a short walk back to town. If you want to walk through Latang Cave, bring a torch and throw some river-friendly sandals in your bag.

There are superb panoramic views of the rice terraces and surrounding mountains from the **Kiltepan Tower**, which is about a 40-minute walk (or 10-minute drive) from town. Take the road heading east out of town and look for a left turn about 500m past the turn-off to Rock Inn.

About a half-hour walk east of town are the small **Bokong Waterfalls**, where you can take a refreshing dip. To get here, follow the road east out of town and take the steps just after Sagada Weaving on the left. Follow the path through the ricefields down to a small river. Cross the river and continue upstream to the falls. The path continues up to the road leading to the town of **Banga-an**, 4km away.

Banga-an, which is serviced by jeepney (P15, seven per day), is where the excellent 45-minute walk to the much larger **Bomodok Falls** (Big Waterfall) begins. The walk traverses rice terraces, and access is sometimes restricted because of traditions associated with the planting and harvest seasons. Check with the Tourist Information Center (p163) before going. On the way back ask your guide or villagers to point you in the direction of **Aguid**, a picturesque village about 3km beyond Banga-an. From Aguid, walk back to Banga-an along the road.

You can bag a few peaks around here without too much trouble, including Sagada's highest mountain, **Mt Sipitan** (2200m).

The majority of this rigorous, full-day hike, which starts near Lake Danum on the way to Besao and ends in Banga-an, is through mossy forest. **Mt Ampacao** (1889m), 10km south of town beyond Ambasing, is a much easier conquest that rewards the climber with outstanding views.

Sleeping

Accommodation in Sagada is great value. In the low season (June to November), expect to get dorm rooms to yourself. These rooms all have shared bathrooms and cold water unless otherwise noted; buckets of warm water are usually available for around P30.

St Joseph's Resthouse (☎ 0918 559 5934; dm/d with cold water P100/500, d/cottages with hot water & private bathroom P1200/1500; p) This is probably the nicest place in town, with a variety of rooms to choose from and excellent views. It consists of several buildings and cottages spread around a garden overlooking the town; the cottages are downright luxurious. The restaurant (meals P90) is nice and its swanky lobby, festooned with artefacts, doubles as a common area for the dorm rooms.

Masferré Inn (☎ 0918 341 6164; d P300) The rooms here, set around a cozy second-floor common area, are simple, warm and inviting. But the restaurant (sandwiches P60, meals P100) is what makes this place stand out. Its walls are filled with prints of the late Sagada-born photographer Eduardo Masferré. It's hard to describe the power of these awesome photos. You might ask the proprietor for a tour of the Masferré Gallery, which is in a private house just outside of town.

Sagada Guesthouse (☎ 0919 300 2763; dm P150, d with private bathroom P600) The clean, cheerful two-bed dorm rooms here are the best value in town.

Alfredo's B&B (☎ 0920 520 0463; d P300) The simple doubles, better than most in town, are fine value, and the restaurant has immense charm – woody and fragrant, with a big fireplace.

If you have a car, there are two excellent options on the road to Bontoc. **Rock Inn** (☎ 0920 902 8608; dm P300, d with hot water & private bathroom P1500; p) is in a citrus grove 2km from the town centre. It's new and in good shape, with a huge, beautiful banquet hall and top-notch doubles overlooking the rock garden and *dap-ay*. **Mapiya-aw Pensione**

(☎ 0921 390 0560; dm/d P100/550; p), a bit closer to town, is exceedingly friendly and rustic. The rooms have balconies and fine views of the mountains.

Eating

There's good food to be had but Sagada's idea of service is somewhat peculiar – take the initiative and go to the counter to place your order. If waiters or waitresses approach your table, they probably think you're cute.

Log Cabin (☎ 0920 520 0910; meals from P300; h dinner) This is a surprise and a pleasure. The Western-style food is hearty and elegantly presented, and on Saturday evening there's a buffet (P250, prepaid reservations only) prepared by a French chef, who also bakes fresh bread for the restaurant. To top it all off there's good wine and a fireplace. You must drop by a few hours in advance to place your order. There's also one room here (P1500); it's the nicest in town, bar none.

Yoghurt House (breakfast/mains from P75/125) This is the next best place for a full meal, especially breakfast, when you can get fruit salads and muesli with yogurt. Dinner specials must be ordered in advance.

Shopping

Weavers at Sagada Weaving produce backpacks, money belts and other practical items in the traditional patterns of the region. You'll find less selection but better prices at **Tam-aw Handicraft** (barangay Madongo) on the road to Banga-an, where the weavers are deaf and/or mute.

Getting There & Away

From Manila, the quickest way to get to Sagada is to take the **Cable Tours** (☎ 0918 521 6790) bus from Quezon City to Bontoc (P600, 12 hours), then hop on a jeepney in Bontoc (P30, one hour, frequent until dusk). Cable Tours leaves Manila at 8pm, and begins the trip back from Bontoc at 3pm.

Getting to Banaue also involves going through Bontoc (p166).

GL Lizardo has nine daily trips between Sagada and Baguio (P220, seven hours) along the scenic Halsema Hwy, which is 2255m at its highest point. Whizzing around hairpin turns with barely an arm's length to spare produces either amazement in the driver's skill or terrible anxiety.

BONTOC

☎ 074 / pop 3064

Whereas Sagada is mellow, Bontoc is a lively, bustling market town. Until recently, its appeal lay in observing the colourful melange of tattooed and *tapis*-wearing tribesfolk coming down from the hills to sell their wares. You'll still see an occasional old woman with tattooed arms or an old man in a G-string, but today Bontoc is best known as a gateway to Maligcong, Mainit and Kalinga.

Information

Raynoldo Waytan, better known as Kinad (☎ 0920 899 3357), is an experienced guide and also acts as a de facto tourist information centre. He tailors trips to Maligcong, Mainit and further afield for around P700 per day for groups of one to four, excluding food. You can contact Kinad and other guides through the tourism office at the Town Hall, or through most hotels.

Landbank (☎ 602 1286) Near the Mountain Province Trade Centre; changes money.

Mountain Province Polytech (per hr P50; h 8am-12.30pm & 1.30-7pm Mon-Sat) The only reliable Internet connection for miles.

PNB (☎ 602 1078; ground fl, Government Commercial Building) One of the few places in the Cordillera north of Baguio that cashes travellers cheques. Its ATM does not accept most international cards, however.

Sights & Activities

The wonderful **Bontoc Museum** (admission P40; h 8am-noon & 1-5pm) is, quite simply, the best in North Luzon. Powerful black-and-white photos and indigenous music accompany the exhibits – one for each of the region's main tribes. Naturally, the head-hunter exhibits, which display axes used to do the deed and *gansa* handles made with human jawbones, are the most fascinating. There are some grisly photos of head-hunters and their booty. The Bontoc huts outside are definitely worth a look – check out the 'bedroom' in one.

Reward yourself at **Wellness Center Massage** (2nd fl, Chico Terrace; h 9am-9pm) with a foot spa (P200) here after a hard day's hike.

Sleeping

The two best hotels by far sit right next to each other in the middle of a ricefield on the quiet eastern side of the Chico River, just a 10-minute walk from the city centre.

Ridge Brook (☎ 0928 402 5876; dm/d P175/700; P) and **Archog Hotel** (☎ 0918 328 6908; www.archoghotel.com; s/d P300/500; P N) both have decent restaurants and clean, good-sized rooms with cable TV. Ridge Brook also has an annex up the road.

Churya-a Hotel & Restaurant (dm/d/tr P100/350/600) is the best guesthouse in the city, though that's not saying much. It scores points with its tastefully adorned common area and café, set on a balcony overlooking the main street. The rooms are clean if unspectacular.

If the above are booked out try **Lynda's Guesthouse** (☎ 0918 698 3303; dm/d P100/350) or **Tchayapan** (dm/d P100/400), which has a popular restaurant with balcony seating.

Eating

Cable Café (☎ 606 8013; meals P90; h 7am-3pm & 6-10pm) This place has no real competition. There's live music every night – OK, it's mostly '80s pop and Pinoy love songs, but it's something. No other place stays open past the informal 10pm curfew and you can snack on wings and drink beer until who knows, maybe even 11pm.

Kammangay (lunch P50) It's all dog meat all the time at this local institution.

Shopping

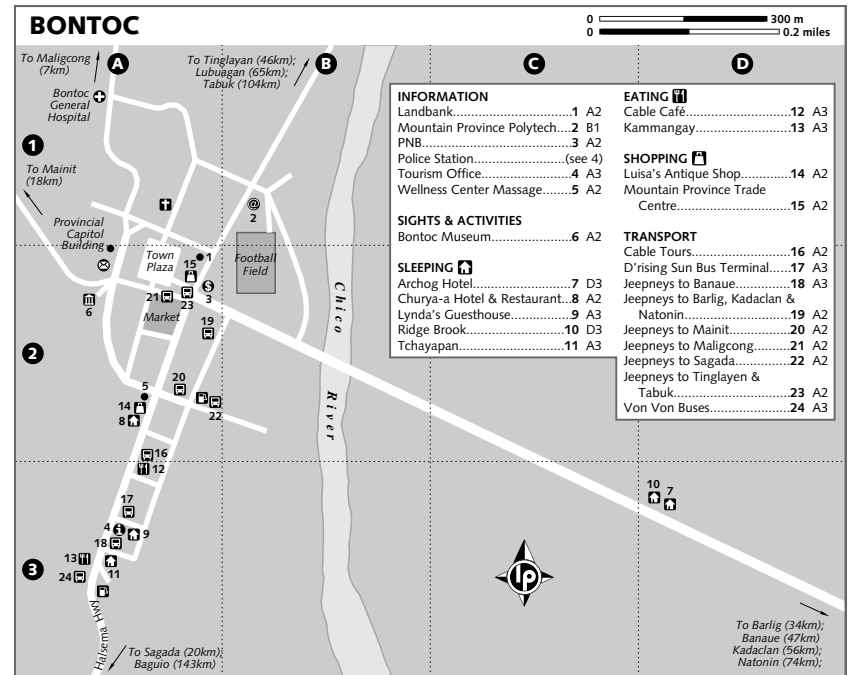
The **Mountain Province Trade Centre** (h 8.30am-6pm) has woven materials from Sagada, Sadanga and nearby Samoki, all of which have their own distinctive styles. **Luisa's Antique Shop** (h 6.30am-6.30pm) mostly carries knock-off Igorot artefacts, but savvy buyers will find the occasional bargain on a genuine old woven blanket or a Samoki *tapis*.

Getting There & Away

Cable Tours (☎ 0918 521 6790) has a daily air-con bus to and from Quezon City, Manila (P600, 12 hours), leaving Manila at 8pm and Bontoc at 3pm. D'Rising Sun has hourly buses to and from Baguio until 4pm (P212, seven hours).

Von Von has two early-morning buses per day that head up the snaking, high-wire road to Banau (P150, two hours); there is also a jeepney that leaves Banau at 8.30am, then turns around and leaves Bontoc around 1pm (P120).

Frequent jeepneys ply the rough road between Bontoc and Sagada (P30, one hour). The last one departs at 5.30pm.



There are four buses and jeepneys per day to Tinglayan (P80, 2½ hours); two of those continue on to Tabuk (P200, six hours).

There are about three jeepneys per day to Mainit (P30, one hour), Maligcong (P16, 45 minutes), Barlig (P50, 1½ hours), Kadaclan (P75, four hours) and Natonin (P100, six hours). These typically depart from the villages in the morning and leave Bontoc between 3pm and 4pm.

AROUND BONTOC Maligcong & Mainit

The towering, sprawling stone-walled rice terraces of Maligcong rival those of Banau and Batad but draw only a fraction of the tourists. If you happen to be visiting between June and early August, you'll find the terraces here still green and lush while those in Batad are fading or already harvested. Mainit has some scalding hot springs and several interesting *dap-ay* and backyard mausoleums adorned by *kalabaw* horns – a symbol of the deceased's wealth.

Maligcong to Mainit is a two-hour grunt up and down a 300m spine. You can also

hike to Aguid, near Sagada, from Mainit (six hours over very steep terrain). Both hikes require a guide.

If you need to overnight, there are two rudimentary guesthouses in Mainit, **Odsey** (r P150) and **Geston's** (r P150), and one guesthouse near Maligcong, **Terraces View** (r P100).

See Bontoc's Getting There & Away section (opposite) for details of jeepney trips from Bontoc to Maligcong and Mainit.

Barlig, Kadaclan & Natonin

East of Bontoc, the secluded, rarely visited villages of Barlig, Kadaclan and Natonin have magnificent rice terraces. From Barlig it takes only about four hours to summit this region's highest peak, **Mt Amuyao** (2702m). The walk from Barlig to Batad, over Mt Amuyao, is one of the best two-day hikes in the Cordillera. Natonin to Mayoyao is a two- or three-day trek. Guides around here typically charge P500 per day and can be found in Barlig's Municipal Hall.

Beautiful Kadaclan boasts a guesthouse called the **Shangri La** (r P70). You won't confuse it with its five-star namesake, but you

can't beat the price. Landlocked Barlig also has a curiously named guesthouse, *Sea World* (r P70), in addition to the *Halfway Inn* (% 0910 300 9010; r P70), which has a satellite phone and a restaurant.

See Bontoc's *Getting There & Away* section (p166) for details of jeepney trips from Bontoc to Barlig, Kadaclan and Natonin.

KALINGA PROVINCE

Rugged, inaccessible and barely touched by civilisation, this northern province in the heart of the Cordillera offers breathtaking scenery and the chance to venture where few travellers have gone before. Kalinga is a place where weekends aren't even a concept, let alone a reality; a place where animals are frequently sacrificed in *cañao*; a place where traditional law still trumps the laws of the modern world. Here you'll meet the last of Kalinga's once-notorious head-hunters and see tattooed tribeswomen with snake bones in their hair. You'll dwell amid free-ranging livestock and hike for days along ancient mountain trails to remote villages enveloped in rice terraces every bit as spectacular as those in Bontoc and Ifugao.

Travel here has its risks, to be sure. If you get hurt it could be days before you have access to modern medical care. (Tribal remedies should be easier to come by.) Plumbing is nonexistent, and forays into the bushes often attract a cadre of voracious pigs looking for a tasty meal. Getting around in Kalinga usually involves riding on the roof of a jeepney with dozens of locals who view you as a curiosity. Be aware that landslides can foul up any trip, especially in the wet season.

The practice of head-hunting has largely ceased, but tribal wars do break out occasionally. At the time of this writing, the villages of Butbut and Bitwagen, and Dacalan and Basao, were sparring over longstanding boundary disputes. While warring tribes rarely bother foreigners, it helps to be cautious. Always bring a guide when trekking here, both for navigation and to help you stay out of trouble.

That said, the people of Kalinga are for the most part wonderfully friendly, and the chances of untoward incident are slim. Gifts are received warmly here, so stock up on matches, gin and, if you really want to be popular, live chickens.

Tinglayan

pop 804

The best starting point for treks in Kalinga is Tinglayan, 2½ hours north of Bontoc on the Chico River. Victor Baculi, the barangay captain of Luplupa (just across the hanging bridge from Tinglayan), is the authority on Kalinga and you'll be engrossed by his stories about the area's culture and history. Victor's son Roger is a rafting guide and can advise on rafting, kayaking or inner-tubing on the Chico. Two good trekking guides are Francis Pa-In in Tinglayan (who is also often in Bontoc) and Moises Atuban in Luplupa. Guide rates average P700 per day.

ACTIVITIES

There's little point in coming here if you're not willing to go trekking. There are several exceptional routes – some are half-day forays into nearby villages, others are several-day grinds terminating as far away as Tabuk or Abra province. For the following treks, your guides will arrange accommodation and transport to the trailhead where necessary.

Other trips include hikes to Sumadel (a five-hour return hike) and Dananao. These villages are home to some of the 10 remaining headhunters in the immediate vicinity, distinguishable by their elaborate chest tattoos. The Dananao hike is best combined with the demanding trek to Tulgao. There are pleasant hot springs and a 30m waterfall near Tulgao. From Dananao you can also walk another three hours up to the untouched village of Balay, from where paths lead west to Abra.

Another excellent one-day hike southwest of Tinglayan is Ngibat–Butbut–Buscalan–Bugnay. You have to be in reasonably good shape and prepared to negotiate a few precarious sections with steep drop-offs on one side. Buscalan is a beautiful village with pretty stone-walled rice terraces and many traditional houses. The track between Buscalan and Bugnay is the most striking section, passing through rolling, grassy mountain terrain. If you're lucky you'll get a good view of the Sleeping Beauty mountain chain, said to resemble – what else – a sleeping woman.

If you're ambitious, the Ngibat–Butbut–Buscalan–Bugnay and Tinglayan–Tulgao hike can be combined into a two-day trek with an overnight in Butbut.

WHEN TO SEE THE RICE TERRACES

The rice terraces of the Cordillera are constantly in flux. Incredible any time of the year, they are at their best one to two months before harvest, becoming bright green then gradually turning gold. Around planting time, the terraces take on a barren, naked look that is also appealing. Mud-walled terraces, such as those in Banaue, look especially impressive during this time. When timing a visit to the terraces, you therefore need to take into account both the harvest cycle and the type of terrace – mud-walled or stone-walled – you'll be visiting.

Many factors go into the timing of the harvest, including rainfall, altitude and, most importantly, local tradition and preference. Some rice-growing regions of the Cordillera plant twice per year, others plant only once. The guide below is very rough, but patterns do emerge. For instance, if you are visiting in June or July, bypass Batad and head to Maligcong. From August to November, terraces with only one planting per year become hopelessly overgrown.

Banaue Mud-walled. One planting per year, usually around March; harvest in August. Best viewing: June to July (before harvest) and February to March (cleaning and planting time).

Barlig, Kadaclan and Natonin Stone-walled. Similar to Hapao and Hungduan.

Batad Stone-walled. Two plantings per year, roughly in August and in February; harvests in June and December. Best viewing: April to May and October to November.

Hapao and Hungduan Mostly stone-walled. One planting per year, around February; harvest around June. Best viewing: April to May.

Kalinga Stone-walled and mud-walled. Varies widely, but usually two plantings, with a season similar to Batad.

Kiangan area Stone-walled and mud-walled. Similar to Batad.

Maligcong and Bontoc area Mostly stone-walled. Similar to Banaue.

Mayoyao area Stone-walled. Similar to Batad.

East of the Chico River, Tanudan municipality sees fewer visitors than the villages west of Tinglayan. This is extremely isolated and rugged terrain. Kalinga culture survives intact here, with tattooed women, traditional houses and spectacular rice terraces. It's a tough all-day walk from Tinglayan to Dacalan barangay, then another six hours to the scenic village of Lubo near Tanudan. From Tanudan you can catch a jeepney to Tabuk.

For a shorter walk, try the Tinglayan–Ambuto–Liglig–Tinglayan loop, which takes you through some small rice terraces, as well as villages where a few indigenous houses remain.

SLEEPING & EATING

The *Sleeping Beauty Resthouse* (r P200) in Tinglayan and the *Luplupa Riverside Inn & Restaurant* (r P200) serve food and have a few basic rooms. *Sleeping Beauty* also has a store where you can stock up on water and snacks for the trail.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Four buses and jeepneys per day from Bontoc stop in Tinglayan (P80, 2½ hours, 45km), and there are also four daily jeepneys to and from Tabuk (P100, three hours, 65km).

Tabuk

pop 78,663

The capital of Kalinga province is a flat, dusty, sweltering university town on the banks of the Chico River. There's not a whole lot to do here, but *Chico River Quest* (% 0920 205 2680; www.chicoriverquest.com; lower/upper Chico River run P3500/6500) runs rafting trips on the Chico River from June to December. The up-river run involves a three-hour morning jeepney ride to Tinglayan, where the rafting trip starts.

Kalinga College of Science & Technology, off the main intersection, has Internet access for P30 per hour.

The best hotel in Tabuk is the *Davidson Hotel* (% 0917 852 7538; Provincial Hwy; s/d P750/880; p n a i), near the city centre, with small, clean doubles. A budget option is the *Kalinga Youth Hostel* (dm P150) near Chico River Quest.

Autobus and Victory Liner have a couple of buses per day to Manila (P650, 11 hours), and there are frequent vans and jeepneys to Tuguegarao (P50, 1½ hours).

Abra Province & Around

On the way from Tinglayan to Tabuk, about 7km north of Lubuagan, a fork off the main

road takes you through hidden Balbalasang-Balbalan National Park and on into Abra Province. It's about four hours' drive from the turn-off to Abra's capital, Bangued. Public transport along this road is infrequent, so you'll need a private 4WD or a mountain bike to make the trip.

The two-hour drive from Balbalan to Balbalan is arguably the most scenic drive in the country, dipping into yawning gorges and cutting across jagged peaks, each hairpin seeming to bring into view a new waterfall, rice terrace or river.

Balbalasang-Balbalan National Park was established to commemorate Kalinga opposition to government-backed logging operations in the area in the 1970s. There are a couple of good camping spots – one of the best is along the river in Balbalasang – and outstanding hiking in the area.

Entering the mountains of Abra province, the ravages of large-scale logging during the Marcos years become plainly visible. One of Luzon's most economically depressed provinces, Abra has little appeal unless you are interested in studying the Tingguian (Itneg) people.

In Peñarrubia, a 10-minute tricycle ride from Bangued, the family of Norma Mina is trying to revive the fading indigenous art of natural dyeing.

The Abraeniana Institute and Research Center, on the campus of Divine World College in Bangued, has a good museum dedicated to Itneg culture.

In Bangued stay at King David Palace (☎ 074-752 8098; Capitulation St, Zone 2; d with fan/air-con P600/1000; p).

Bangued is more easily accessed from Vigan, Ilocos Sur, which is just 1½ hours away by bus (P40).

BANAUE

☎ 074 / pop 2312

It's no idyllic mountain getaway like Sagada, but Banaue sits at the foot of a truly mesmerising display. These mud-walled rice terraces, North Luzon's most famous sight, have a pleasing, organic quality that differentiates them from the stone-walled terraces in most of the Cordillera. World Heritage-listed, they are impressive not only for their chiselled beauty but because they were created around 2000 years ago.

The rice terraces were built by the Ifugao. Along with being the most feared head-hunters in the Cordillera, they were skilled engineers who invented a sophisticated irrigation system of bamboo tubes and elaborate mud channels to bring water to the terraces.

The Ifugao were as skilled at carving wood as they were at carving terraces, and their sacred wooden statues, the *bulol*, still remain an icon of the Philippines.

While Banaue remains the centre of the rich Ifugao culture, tourism now shapes the town. A paved road from the lowlands ensures that thousands of tourists visit the city each year, and there's no shortage of aggressive guides, drivers and hawkers looking to make a buck off them. Fortunately it's easy to leave the tourists behind by escaping to villages like Batad, which have their own incredible rice terraces.

Information

The well-staffed **Banaue Tourist Information Center** (☎ 386 4011; 11 6am-7pm), located on the main square, will give you the scoop on hiking in the area. It also maintains a definitive list of prices for accredited guides (P800 for full-day hikes) and private transport to and from selected locations. You can get a rudimentary map of the area here or at most hotels for P10.

There are cheaper freelance guides lingering around, but most aren't equipped for mountain rescues.

Batad has its own network of guides; see p173.

Stock up on pesos as it's difficult to change money and impossible to cash travellers cheques in Banaue. RSR is a convenience store that changes US dollars at a poor rate; some hotels accept payments in dollars.

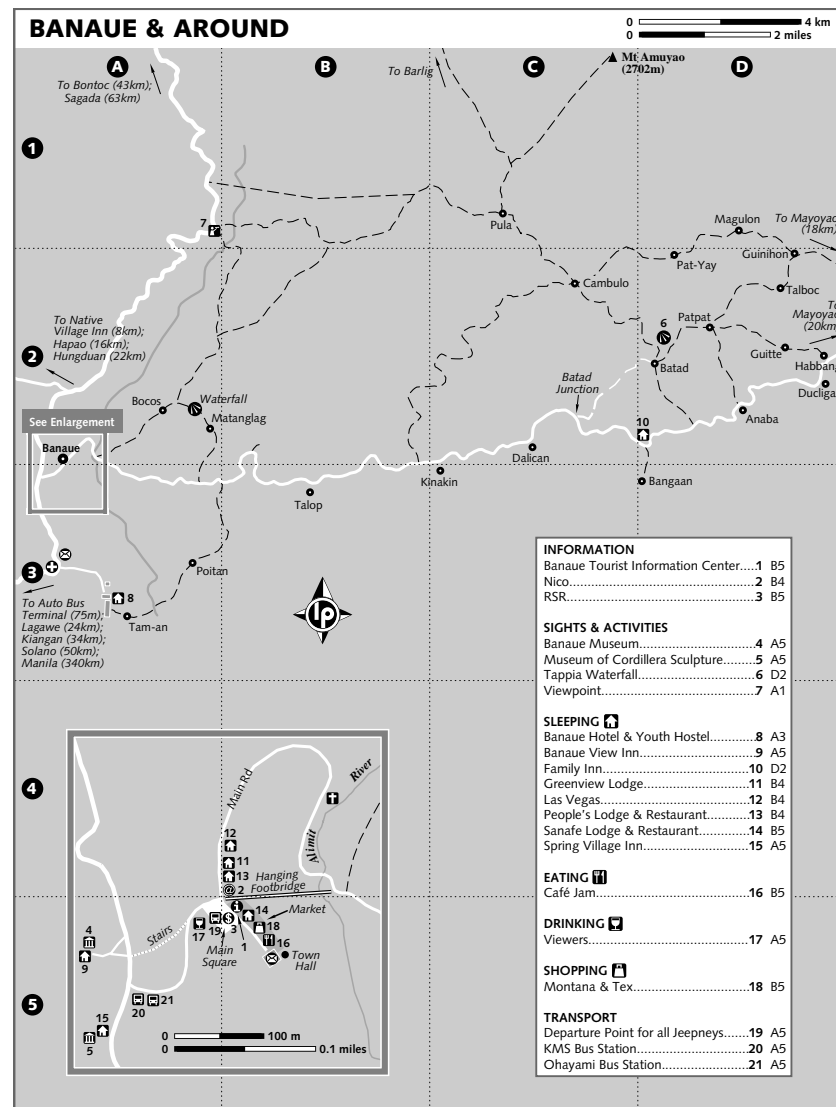
Nico (☎ 386 4097; per hr P60), near the Banaue Tourist Information Center, is the only reliable Internet connection in town.

There's a post office inside the town hall, just southeast of the main square.

Sights & Activities

VIEWPOINT

It's a 10-minute tricycle ride up to the viewpoint (return P180), which is the best place to observe Banaue's famed mud-walled terraces in all their glory. 'The viewpoint' actually consists of four viewpoints lining



the road to Bontoc at 200m intervals. The best time to view the terraces is late in the afternoon, when they are backlit by the setting sun. The higher you go, the better the view. There are souvenir shops at most of these points, and at one you can get your photo taken with old Ifugao ladies decked out in full tribal regalia.

MUSEUMS

Owned by descendants of anthropologist Otley Beyer, the **Banaue Museum** (admission P30; 11 8am-5pm) contains an interesting collection of Ifugao, Bontoc and Kalinga artefacts. There is also the quirky **Museum of Cordillera Sculpture** (admission P100; 11 7am-5pm), next to Spring Village Inn, where hundreds

of *bulol* and other Ifugao woodcarvings, including some rare originals, are on display. There are also some fascinating old books that you can read, including a 1912 *National Geographic* on Ifugao head-hunters.

TAM-AN, POITAN, MATANGLAG & BOCOS VILLAGES

Tourist brochures still advertise these as artists' colonies, but you're not likely to see much creating going on. Still, the hikes between these villages traverse ricefields and are pleasant enough if you're not up to tackling the longer treks further afield. You'll see traditional Ifugao houses in all of these villages.

Much of the 45-minute hike from Tam-an to Poitan (which starts near Banaue Hotel & Youth Hostel's swimming pool) follows a century-old irrigation canal. Once you reach Poitan, ascend to the road, go left toward Banaue, then hang a right at a staircase a few minutes later and start climbing. In 30 minutes you'll reach Matanglag, where a few bronzesmiths work. From here it's another half hour to Bocos, known for its woodcarving. Along the way you'll pass the waterfall visible from Banaue. From Bocos you can descend to Banaue or head west across yet more rice terraces and end up at the viewpoint. Ask for directions frequently or bring a guide if you don't want to get lost.

Sleeping & Eating

Doubles and singles have private bathrooms and hot water unless otherwise noted; shared bathrooms have cold water only, with hot-water buckets available for around P40. In the low season (June to November), one or two people can easily grab an entire dorm room for under P200. Book ahead in the high season.

The best hotels tend to double as the best restaurants. Most restaurants close by 9pm.

Banaue View Inn (☎ 386 4078; dm/d P150/600; p) This inn sits at the top of a hill overlooking town and the rice terraces. Rooms are pleasant and clean. You might ask the owner, Lily, to regale you with stories about her grandfather, renowned Yale anthropologist Otley Beyer, who wrote extensively about Ifugao culture, or her father, William, a swashbuckling antiques dealer who sired

16 children. Some of Otley's books and William's pieces are on display next door at the family-owned Banaue Museum.

Sanafe Lodge & Restaurant (☎ 386 4085; sanafelodge@yahoo.com; s/d P400/700) This hotel's lobby is peppered with Ifugao sculptures while the huge outdoor patio, with a rice-terrace view, is a must for happy hour. The rooms are adequately clean but can't compare to the restaurant, which is the best in the town centre. Meat, pasta and Filipino dishes average P130.

Greenview Lodge (☎ 386 4021; dm/d P100/600) The rooms here are the nicest in town, cosy and clean with shiny parquet floors. The doubles have queen-sized beds. It's in the town centre and two rooms have rice-terrace views.

Banaue Hotel & Youth Hostel (☎ 386 4087, 02-524 2502 in Manila; dm/d P200/1500; p i s) This concrete monstrosity has zero character, but it does boast upscale touches like a fancy restaurant, business centre, spa and nice bathrooms. Unless it's busy, you may feel inspired to act out scenes from *The Shining* in the depressing long hallways.

Café Jam (☎ 386 4008; meals P110) Tidy restaurant with a good sound system and a patchy Internet connection (P60 per hour).

There are two places outside of Banaue where you can stay in transplanted Ifugao huts. The best is **Native Village Inn** (☎ 0926 700 3647; huts with shared bathroom P700), 9km from Banaue on the road to Hapao. It's perched atop a high ridge with amazing views of the terraces below. To get here take a tricycle (return P300) or jeepney. Overlooking scenic Bangaan, 14km east of town, there's the **Family Inn** (small/large huts with shared bathroom P300/600).

Also recommended:

People's Lodge & Restaurant (☎ 386 4014; dm/s/d P150/300/400) Has a popular restaurant; the two-bed dorm rooms are a steal.

Spring Village Inn (☎ 386 4037; d P600) Clean rooms with good views.

Las Vegas (s/d with shared bathroom P150/200) Good budget choice in centre. The restaurant tends to stay open later than 9pm.

Entertainment

Viewers (☎ 386 4046) has live acoustic music nightly until 10pm. The Banaue Hotel & Youth Hostel stages performances of traditional Ifugao dancing for large groups (P1500 per group).

Shopping

Ifugao woodcarvings and crafts are everywhere, but Montana & Tex, near Café Jam, has the best selection. There are a couple of workshops on the main road toward Bocos where you might find better deals.

Getting There & Away

Auto Bus has a direct bus between Banaue and Manila (Sampaloc), departing Banaue at 5.30pm and Manila at 10pm (P462, nine hours). It's a good idea to reserve in advance. Alternatively, take a jeepney to Lagawe (P25, 30 minutes), then another to Solano (P48, 1½ hours) and catch a Manila-bound bus there (P350, seven hours).

KMS (four buses per day) and Ohayami (three buses per day) travel between Banaue and Baguio (P365, nine hours) via Solano and San Jose.

Two Von Von buses heading to Bontoc pass by Banaue every morning (P150, two hours); there's also an 8.30am jeepney (P120) that leaves Bontoc around 1pm. Connect to Sagada in Bontoc.

To get to Kiangang (P50, one hour) you must change jeepneys in Lagawe. There are four jeepneys and one minibus per day to Hungduan (P55, 22km, two hours) via Hapao (P45, 17km, 1½ hours). Hapao is within tricycle range (return P600, 1½ hours).

See p174 for details on getting to Batad.

All jeepneys leave from the main square.

AROUND BANAUE

Besides Banaue, four other Ifugao rice terraces are included on the Unesco World Heritage list: Batad, Mayoyao, Hapao and Kiangang. With the exception of Batad, these terraces can all be seen from the road. All except Mayoyao, 40km east of Banaue over a very rough road, are covered here.

Batad & Around

pop 1100

Batad's amphitheatre-like stone-walled rice terraces are widely considered the world's most striking. The recent arrival of electricity has brightened things up a bit, and the completion of a road nearby has brought it a bit closer to civilisation, but Batad remains your quintessential backpacker mecca, a place where you can lose yourself amid stunning scenery and the serene aura of isolation.

ACTIVITIES

Considering you have to walk into Batad, it's hardly surprising that the main draw is hiking. What follows are just a few of the many hikes in the area. The Banaue Tourism Information Center (p170) or any guide can recommend longer treks.

Batad has a network of guides accredited by the Batad Environmental Tour Guides Association. Twenty per cent of all fees these guides collect goes toward restoring the rice terraces. Guides aren't necessary for all hikes around Batad, but you'll find the local knowledge of these guides a huge asset, especially if you want to locate local craftsmakers.

Tappia Waterfall Hike

It's a 40-minute hike across the terraces to the 30m-high Tappia Waterfall, where you can sunbathe on the rocks or swim in the chilly water. To get here from the main guesthouse area, walk down to the village and then up to the promontory, just to the left of the Waterfall Side Lodge. The paved path down the other side is steep and slippery, and should be avoided in the rain.

Batad-Bangaan Hike

This 2½-hour hike is a recommended route out of Batad or, if you prefer, in. From Batad, take the path behind Rita's down to the small river. Cross to the other side, then head across the small concrete bridge to the left and pick up the path. When it forks after 10 minutes go right. From there it's smooth sailing, so you can relax and enjoy the stunning panoramas of the surrounding mountains and rice terraces, bisected by a river hundreds of metres below. Eventually you'll walk through a rice terrace and hit the main road, from where it's 2km to Family Inn overlooking Bangaan, and another 1.5 km from there to Batad junction.

Batad-Cambulo-Pula-Banaue Viewpoint Hike

You're best off with a guide for this one. From Batad to Cambulo is around two hours, from Cambulo to Pula is about three hours, and from Pula to the viewpoint it's an easy four-hour walk.

Much of this hike is through rice terraces. The section from Cambulo to Pula follows a winding river, with terraces carved high

into the mountains. Pula is a tiny collection of Ifugao houses on a hilly outcrop.

Just outside of Pula, heading toward Banaue viewpoint, there's a waterfall and a deep swimming pool under a bridge. The path from Pula to the viewpoint cuts through lush forest, a nice change after so many rice terraces.

If you take this route, you might plan on spending a night in Pula or Cambulo – there are simple guesthouses in both villages. You can also bail out in Cambulo and walk back to the main road near Kinakin (3½ hours, 13km), where you can flag down a ride back to Banaue.

Pula–Mt Amuyao Hike

From Pula it's a taxing, seven-hour climb up the region's highest peak (2702m). If you go you'll need a guide (P800 per day) and a healthy amount of courage. Be prepared to sleep at the radar station on the top. Amuyao is much easier to scale from Barlig, near Bontoc (p167).

SLEEPING & EATING

Accommodation in Batad is primarily found in *sitio* Chung Chung, perched on a spectacular hill overlooking Batad village and its famous rice terrace, known as 'the amphitheatre'. Rita's, Batad Pension, Hillside and Simon's all have basic – but appealingly rustic – double rooms for P100 per head. The very friendly Rita's has a couple of Ifugao huts you can stay in. Simon's has the best view, although Batad Pension and Hillside have some rooms with views. All have restaurants of similar quality, although Simon's has the most extensive menu (including *malawach*, a Yemeni flatbread).

Foreigners Inn sits in the middle of Batad village at the foot of the amphitheatre, but you'll get better views from Chung Chung.

The guesthouses can fill up in the March-to-May high season when Filipinos on summer holiday arrive in large groups.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

From Banaue, it's 12km over a rocky road to Batad junction, where a 4WD track leads three bone-jarring kilometres up to the 'saddle' high above Batad. From the saddle it's a 40-minute hike downhill to Batad.

From Banaue, three or four jeepneys per day pass by Batad junction (P50, one hour).

From there you'll have to walk to the saddle. Alternatively, you can team up with other travellers and hire a private jeepney to take you from Banaue to Batad junction (return P1350) or all the way to the saddle (return P1850). Tricycles also make the trip (return P500 to junction, P600 to saddle).

To return to Banaue, either arrange transport in advance, walk (taking one of the hikes outlined above), or catch a passing jeepney anywhere along the main road to Banaue (traffic heading back is 'heaviest' in the morning).

Hapao & Hungduan

Spread out over the valley floor, the rice terraces in Hapao and Hungduan are dazzling.

To walk to a small pool beside a river in Hapao (population 2000), a barangay of Hungduan 17km northwest of Banaue, take the concrete steps behind the viewpoint and turn left at the bottom. Follow the paved irrigation canal for about 10 minutes until you reach a small group of houses. It's about another 15 minutes to the river, where you can cool off in the refreshing water.

Five kilometres beyond Hapao is Hungduan *poblasyon* (town centre; population 1700), the site of the spectacular Bacung spider web terraces and the jumping-off point for the six-hour climb up Mt Napulawan (2642m), the final hiding place of General Yamashita at the end of WWII.

You can inquire about more hikes at the useful Hungduan tourism information centre, a couple of kilometres short of Hapao. You can secure guides at the Hungduan mayor's office (☎ 074-386 4115), where there's also a guesthouse. Guides cost P500 a day.

There are four jeepneys and one minibus per day from Banaue to Hungduan (P55) via Hapao (P45). You can also take a tricycle to Hapao (return P600, 1½ hours).

Kiangan

pop 1600

Believed to be the first human settlement in Ifugao, Kiangan is where Ifugao and American troops helped force General Yamashita, the 'Tiger of Malaya', to make his informal surrender in WWII. A pyramid-shaped War Memorial Shrine marks the spot where this occurred in 1945. Nearby Million Dollar Hill, so named because it's believed that's how much it cost the US to bomb the Japanese forces.

THE IFUGAO HUDHUD

Their rice terraces get all the attention, but the Ifugao have another ancient tradition recognized by Unesco. The epic oral chants collectively known as the *hudhud* are sung by the Ifugao around Kiangan to alleviate boredom while planting and harvesting the rice fields.

The *hudhud* records the history and traditions of the Kiangan Ifugao. It pays homage to the deeds of heroes and heroines both mortal and immortal, to battles won, to heads taken and to riches gained. The complete *hudhud* consists of more than 200 chants, each with its own chapters and storylines. Reciting just one chant can take up to four days. It is mainly women who commit these marathon chants to memory and sing them in the fields. The chants are also recited during funeral wakes.

It is believed the original chants date from the 15th century, although some scholars think they predate the rice terraces, which could make them more than 2000 years old. Legend has it that the legendary hero Pumbakhayon was one of the main authors of the *hudhud*. Bored with the same old monotonous chants, he appeared one day on a rock and belted out an entirely new collection of chants, which were duly recorded for posterity by two sharp-minded female admirers (you can visit the platformlike Rock of Pumbakhayon in the village of Kuto, near Kiangan). The *hudhud* of today probably bears little resemblance to its earliest incarnation. Like any oral chant, it has been modified over time by collective re-creation.

These precious chants are now in danger of dying out as younger Ifugao feel they have better things to do than undertake the Herculean task of committing weeks' worth of lyrics to memory. In an effort to preserve the *hudhud*, a government-funded school of living traditions has been established in Kiangan to teach younger Ifugao the *hudhud* and other ancient tribal customs that are under threat from the modern world. Unesco named the *hudhud* a 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity' in 2001.

Across the lawn from the shrine is the Ifugao Museum (☎ 8.30am-noon & 1-5pm), which houses a small collection of Ifugao artefacts. Ambuwaya Lake, 3km east of town, is a good spot for a swim.

The Unesco World Heritage Nagacadan terraces and Julungan terraces are about 10km west of town, accessible by tricycle. You can hike up into the Nagacadan terraces and then descend to Maggok village (three hours). For longer hikes, talk to tourism council head Remi Allaga at the Kiangan Municipal Hall.

Pangaggawan Cave is a three-hour hike from Kiangan; there are other caves in the vicinity. From town a classic vertical Igorot trail leads 1½ hours up Mt Kapugan, from where there are exceptional views of the surrounding terraces.

On 1 May, Gotad Ad Kiangan Festival celebrates Ifugao performing arts with traditional forms of singing, dancing and chanting.

The Kiangan Youth Hostel (☎ 0910 324 3296; dm/d P150/300) has passable rooms.

Autobus has a bus departing Kiangan for Manila at 6pm (P450, nine hours); the bus from Manila leaves at 9.30pm. You can also take a jeepney to Solano (P60, two hours) and flag down a bus to Manila there. KMS

has a bus to Baguio departing at 5.30pm (P350, nine hours).

Getting to Banaue involves taking a jeepney to Lagawe (P25, 30 minutes, hourly), then another to Banaue (P25, 30 minutes, every 30 minutes).

THE NORTHEAST

The northeast is dominated by the fertile Cagayan Valley, which is crisscrossed by the Cagayan River and bordered on either side by the Cordillera and the Sierra Madre. The Sierra Madre, which extend from Aurora province in the south to the tip of Cagayan province in the north, are among the country's most impenetrable mountains and are home to wild and woolly Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park. The northeast also includes the provinces of Nueva Vizcaya, Isabela and Quirino.

BALER & AROUND

☎ 042 / pop 30,000

Cut off from the outside world by the Sierra Madre and the Philippine Sea, Baler (bah-*lehr*), the capital of Aurora province,

is best known as the location of the surfing scene in *Apocalypse Now*. The local 'Baler Boys', who learned to surf in the '70s on boards left behind by the cast, today offer what must be some of the cheapest surfing lessons on the planet.

Baler is basically a one-trick town, although good hiking and beach-exploring opportunities do exist for more adventurous travellers. Those looking to get away from it all will have no problem doing so here.

Information

There are no ATMs and banks do not change cash. Gr8site (cnr San Luis St & Burgos St; per hr P40; h 9am-10pm) is the place for Internet access.

The friendly Provincial Tourism Office (9% 209 4373; Provincial Capitol Compound; h 8am-noon, 1-5pm Mon-Fri) can set you up with hiking guides (P750 per day).

Sights & Activities

Offshore typhoons kick up big swells for surfing between August and October. From November to March, onshore breezes make conditions tough, but that doesn't stop the town from hosting the Aurora Surfing Cup every February on Sabang Beach, an endless strip of fine dark sand extending north from Baler proper to Charlie's Point, the river-mouth break seen in *Apocalypse Now*. The biggest waves are over a reef at Cemento Beach, 6km south of town across the San Luis and Cemento Rivers.

When the Baler Boys are not out catching waves, you'll find a few of them hanging out at a lifeguard stand dubbed Baywatch in the middle of Sabang Beach. They rent boards for P150 per hour; lessons are also P150 per hour. The other option for board rental is the Surfer's Inn, which has the same prices as Baywatch.

If you continue 4.4km past Cemento wharf, you'll come to Digisit, where you can snorkel off the reef. From Digisit you can hike further south to Dicasalarin Cove (two to three hours), where there is a nice white-sand beach. You'll need a guide for this jungle hike.

Inland from Baler, in the jungle near San Luis, are the Ditungabo Falls (Mother Falls), which drop 15m into a small reservoir above an unfinished hydroelectric dam. The turn-off to the falls is on the left, 5.7km west of San Luis (just before the small bridge leading into barangay Ditungabo). From there,

walk or take a tricycle 2.1km along a rugged 4WD track to the small dam, from where it's a somewhat technical 45-minute hike to the falls up a creek bed next to a water pipeline.

You can hire a bangka at Cemento wharf and negotiate a price to explore secluded beaches and coves north and south of Baler.

Museo de Baler (Quezon Park; h 8am-noon & 1-5pm) has some interesting photos and exhibits on the history and culture of the area.

Sleeping & Eating

Most of Baler's accommodation is along the beach in Sabang.

Bahia de Baler Garden Hotel (9% 0920 555 0451; d P1200; p a) The nicest rooms in town are here. While its large, neon-lit restaurant is not as sophisticated as it thinks it is, it does have air-con, good seafood and Jose Cuervo tequila.

Bay's Inn (9% 209 4312; d with cold water & fan/air-con P350/750; p) Its lively beachfront restaurant does a reasonable job of capturing the surfer ethos, with yummy tacos (P40) and a grungy postpunk play list. The rooms are just OK, however.

Amco Beach Resort (9% 209 4209; d P750; p a) Further down the road, this is a large, somewhat quaint colonial-style building set well off the beach. The rooms are above average for Baler, average for anywhere else.

Drinking

Cocohut (h 8pm-2.30am) and Maharajah (h 8pm-2.30am), right next to each other across the road from Bay's Inn, roll out live-music acts every night. They can get pretty rowdy on weekends.

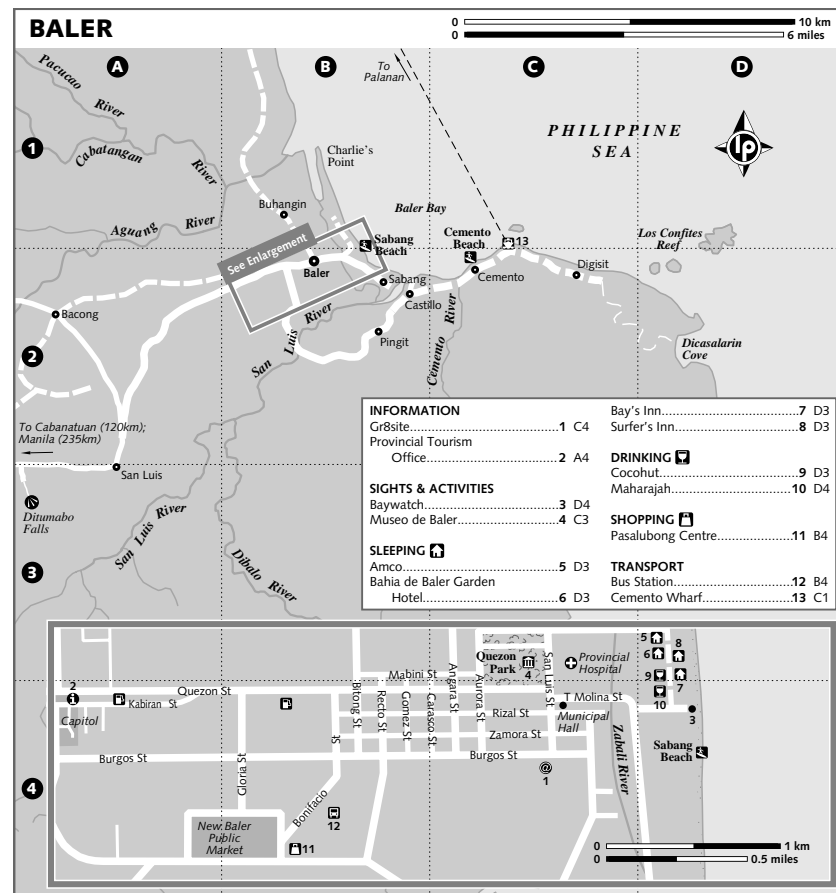
Shopping

Next to the public market in Baler, Pasalubong Centre sells locally made crafts and hand-woven hats at good prices.

Getting There & Away

Baler is a seven-hour drive from Manila, with the last three hours on a rugged dirt road over the southern Sierra Madre. Genesis has three early-morning air-con buses per day to and from Pasay (P317).

From all other points in North Luzon, you must travel first to Cabanatuan. D'Liner has eight buses per day between Cabanatuan and Baler (P130, four hours), and there are air-con vans as well (P150).



You may be able to catch a cargo ship from Cemento wharf to Palanan in North-Sierra Madre Natural Park (p178).

NUEVA VIZCAYA

9% 078

This province west of the Cordilleras is usually bypassed by travellers, but it does hold some appeal.

Solano

pop 52,000

Solano is a fairly typical commercial centre, but it does make a convenient stop for those who want to break up their journey from Manila to Isabela, Cagayan or even Banaue.

Governor's Garden Hotel (9% 326 6053; JManzana St; s/d P870/970; p a) is a once-refined place that is still the nicest place to stay in Solano. A quieter option is Sheila Marie's (9% 326 5135; Bintawan Rd; r P1000; p a s), which has a couple of nice rooms set amid strange pools. It's 1km outside the town centre.

Ayuyang (115 Magsaysay St, Solano; a) is a cluttered and comfortable bar with a nautical theme. It stays open well past midnight and has nightly live acoustic music.

Buses heading between Manila and points north are constantly zooming through Solano. To Manila, it costs P350 and takes seven hours. The main companies are Victory Liner, Baliwag, Florida, Auto Bus and Dagupan Bus.

To get to Banaue, you must first take a jeepney to Lagawe (P48, 1½ hours), then another to Banaue (P25, 30 minutes).

Around Solano

The Alayan Caves, purported to be the fifth-largest cave system in the Philippines, are in Capisaan, a barangay of Kasibu, 40km (two hours) east of Solano. A guide is always around in Kasibu.

Ambaguio, a Kalanguya mountain town 25km west of Solano, is a good base for the six-hour hike up Mt Pullol, from where there are excellent views of the Luzon's highest peak, Mt Pulag (2922). You can also launch an assault on Mt Pulag from this side, but it will take about three days. Contact the Nueva Vizcaya Tourist Office (☎ 805 3970) in Bayombong for help securing a guide from Ambaguio.

NORTHERN SIERRA MADRE NATURAL PARK

Travel doesn't get much more rugged than in this vast expanse of mountainous, critter-infested rainforest that dominates North Luzon's east coast. The Switzerland-sized park hosts more than 60% of the plant species found in the country and 29 threatened species of animal, including the critically endangered Philippine eagle, the country's national bird. The world's most endangered crocodile also lives here. The park's unspoiled coastline is inhabited by the Dumagats, a semi-nomadic Aeta (Negrito) group whose lifestyle has been relatively unchanged for generations. This region was also a refuge for the last remaining rebels during the Philippine Revolution – American-led forces captured General Emilio Aguinaldo in the coastal town of Palanan on 23 March 1901.

There are a couple of good places to get guides and information. The DOT Region II Office (right) in Tuguegarao can set you up with guides or with other groups going in to the park. Closer to the park there's a DENR protected areas superintendent office in Balug, 5km south of Tumaui. About 30km east of Naguilian is San Mariano, the jumping-off point for the three-day trek to Palanan. Guides for this trek can be arranged through San Mariano's helpful mayor's office.

Endangered Philippine crocodiles tend to hang out near San Jose, two hours east of San Mariano by logging truck (one per day) –

if you want to see them, the Cagayan Valley Program for Environment and Development (CVPED; ☎ 0920 562 3318; www.cvped.org/croc.php) at Isabela State University in Cabagan has a crocodile conservation project and arranges guided observation treks for visitors.

There's a DENR guesthouse and a few restaurants in Palanan.

To enter the park you can fly, take a cargo boat or walk in from San Mariano. Cyclone Airlines (☎ 078-652 0913 in Cauayan) flies six-seaters to/from Palanan and Maconacon (both P1650, 30 minutes) from Cauayan. Isabela. Planes leave when full, usually daily. Chemtrad Airlines (☎ 078-844 3113 in Tuguegarao, 02-833 1974 in Manila) has irregular flights to Maconacon from Tuguegarao (P1900, 35 minutes).

You can find cargo boats bound for Palanan in Baler (one day); boats bound for Maconacon leave from San Vicente on the extreme northeastern tip of Luzon. Both trips take about 12 hours. Be prepared to wait up to a week for the next ship out of Palanan. Bangka occasionally make the trip between Maconacon and Palanan.

To get to San Mariano catch a jeepney or bus in Ilagan, Cauayan or Naguilian.

TUGUEGARAO

☎ 078 / pop 121,000

Tuguegarao is the political and commercial capital of Cagayan province. The 14,000 licensed tricycles are a rude interruption to the otherwise bucolic surroundings, but the city is a convenient base for forays into the country's largest cave system, 25km to the east, and into Kalinga province to the west.

Information

Tuguegarao's main thoroughfare is Bonifacio St. It has plenty of ATMs and Internet cafés.

The well-staffed DOT Region II Office (☎ 844 1621; Rizal St; 11 9am-6pm) is an excellent source of information not only for Tuguegarao and Cagayan but also for the Batanes and Babuyan island chains, Nueva Vizcaya and Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park. Staffer Selso Turingan is also involved with the Sierra Madre Outdoor Club, which organises adventures to all of these destinations.

Sights & Activities

More than 300 caves have been discovered in the municipality of Peñablanca,

about 40 minutes northeast of town. The seven-chambered Callao Cave and the more challenging Sierra Cave nearby are both accessible by car. Callao Cave is reached by walking up 184 steps. Several sinkholes illuminate the cavernous chambers, one of which houses a little chapel with pews and an altar. To get here catch a jeepney from Don Domingo Market, just north of the city, or take a tricycle (P150).

A must-do excursion if you're in the area is to hire a bangka (P250) near Callao Cave and head 15 minutes upriver to watch tens of thousands of bats pour out of the caves for a flight over the Pinacanauan River at dusk. There is a pebble beach with a picnic table near here.

Further afield, Odessa Cave, estimated to be at least the second-longest cave system in the country at 12.5km (it still hasn't been explored to its terminus), is for advanced cavers only. Access requires a 7km hike from Callao, followed by a 30m rappel into a sinkhole. Two hours north of Tuguegarao, in the region of Baggao, is another extensive cave system where you'll find Bluewater Cave and Falls, a series of underground waterfalls.

The Sierra Madre Outdoor Club guides a wide range of excursions to all the area's caves. A full-day excursion for up to six people costs P500 to P3000 per group, including equipment. Price is dependant on the size of the group and the technical difficulty of the excursion. You can contact the club's guides through the DOT Region II Office or Callao Caves Resort, across the Pinacanauan River from Callao Cave.

Adventure & Expeditions (☎ 855 1298; www.whitewater.ph) guides kayaking trips on the Pinacanauan, where clean, green waters cut through the limestone cliffs. This involves taking a bangka 5km upstream (P1000), then navigating the return trip via no-flip kayaks over class 2 and 3 rapids (P500 per kayak, P500 per guide). Adventures & Expeditions also organises multiday trips that include caving, kayaking and rafting on the Chico River in nearby Kalinga Province.

Sleeping & Eating

Callao Caves Resort (☎ 846 7576; Callao; dm/4-person cottages with fan P100/800, r with air-con P600; P) This sprawling compound on the bank of the Pinacanauan has easy access to the Peñablanca caves and a pleasant jungle feel, although its

rooms are far from modern. There are a few basic restaurants right next door.

Hotel Delfino (☎ 844 1953; Gonzaga St; s/d P450/550; P a) It's a bit old and vulnerable to street noise, but the rooms are big, clean and cheap. Its Chinese restaurant has some of the best eats in town.

Hotel Lorita (☎ 846 2565; 67 Rizal St; s/d P690/965; P a) The rooms here are similar to those at Hotel Delfino, only slightly newer, slightly smaller and slightly more expensive.

Hotel Roma (☎ 844 2222; cnr Bonifacio St & Luna St; s/d P1000/1350; P a s) This newly renovated edifice is the nicest and most modern hotel in town; it's also the priciest.

Hotel Ivory (☎ 844 1275; Buntun Hwy; d with cold/hot water P350/750; P a s) West of the centre, this place tends to be a bit quieter and has decent rooms.

Tuguegarao's only restaurant of distinction is Elim's Court (☎ 844 8175; 19 Del Rosario St; meals P125; a), which has good coffee, steaks, a relaxed atmosphere and Internet access.

Getting There & Away

Air Philippines (☎ 846 7578, 02-855 9000 in Manila) and Asian Spirit (☎ 844 8141, 02-855 3333 in Manila) both have Monday, Wednesday and Friday flights to and from Manila (P3245, one hour). The Asian Spirit plane from Manila continues on to Basco, Batanes (P3250, 50 minutes).

Chemtrad Airlines (☎ 02-833 1974 in Manila, 078-844 3113 in Tuguegarao) has irregular flights to Maconacon (P1900, 35 minutes) in Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park, and to Basco (P3395, one hour).

Victory Liner (☎ 844 0777), Baliwag (☎ 844 4325), Autobus (☎ 844 5519) and Florida Liner (☎ 846 4259) all run regular buses to and from Manila (P600, 12 hours), via Solano (P300, five hours). GMW has buses to Laoag (P333, 6½ hours) via Claveria (P196, 3½ hours) and Pagudpud (P270, five hours). Mini-buses leave frequently to Tabuk (P75, 1½ hours, 55km). All buses depart from near the Don Domingo Market, north of town.

CLAVERIA AND THE BABUYAN ISLANDS

☎ 078

In the northwest of Cagayan province, the small coastal town of Claveria has a long, pretty and clean beach surrounded by mountains. It's a fine place to stop and relax for a few days if you're travelling on the northern route between Laoag and Tuguegarao.

Sights & Activities

If you want to be way ahead of the pack, walk down to Taggat (Lagoon), just west of Claveria, and catch a bangka to Fuga, the nearest of the Babuyan Islands. A few boats per week make the three-hour trip; P200 per head should get you there. Fuga is a completely undeveloped island with beautiful white-sand beaches and no electricity or accommodation. From there, it's an easy hop to the most developed Babuyan island, Calayan, where the mayor can set you up with a home-stay. From Calayan you can catch boats to the other islands or take a ferry back to the mainland port of Aparri, 80km east of Claveria (P300, five hours, every other day).

Humpback whales breed in the Babuyan waters from February to June. There are no organised whale-watching trips, but you can charter a bangka from a local fisherman. You are more likely to spot dolphins, though.

Sleeping & Eating

Claveria's lodging options are nothing to crow about. The Bayview Inn & Restaurant (% 866 1071; r with fan P500, with air-con & TV P1000; p) is a family-run establishment where the rooms are set around a very pink dining area. If you ask, you can get fresh seafood meals. Ocean Inn (% 866 1160; r P1200; p a) has by far the cleanest and most modern rooms, but its restaurant is substandard and the rooms are incomprehensibly set around the driveway, motel-style. The Cabicungan Inn Beach Resort (% 866 1011; r with fan P375, with air-con & TV P1000; p a), the last place on the east end of the beach, has OK rooms (with private bathrooms) set too far off the beach.

Getting There & Away

GMW buses between Laoag (P110, three hours) and Tuguegarao (P196 3½ hours) come through four times daily in each direction. Frequent minibuses go to Pagudpud (P40, 1½ hours). Flag buses down from near the Petron station on the National Hwy.

BATANES

Located more than 860km from Manila, this group of 10 islands, three of them inhabited, seems displaced in time and space. From Y'ami, the northernmost island of the Batanes, you can see Taiwan on a clear day.

The islands seem less tropical and more like the Scottish Highlands, but the pace is slow and the people, despite being among the poorest in the country, are friendly and hospitable.

The Spanish didn't set foot in the islands until 1686, when they forced the indigenous Ivatan (literally, 'Place Where Boats are Cast Ashore') to settle in the lowlands where they could be administered more easily. Today, many residents still barter fish, garlic and other crops to meet their needs.

It's not uncommon for six typhoons to hit the archipelago between July and November. Traditional homes are built typhoon tough, with metre-thick limestone walls and bushy roofs made of cogon grass, and positioned slightly underground.

That quirky, bushy headpiece that some Ivatan women wear is called a *vakul*. It is made from the fibre of the *voyavoy* palm, found only in Batanes. Each item takes three weeks to make but lasts a lifetime, protecting the wearer from the sun and rain.

The Batanes' sheer isolation and location in the middle of typhoon alley keeps mass tourism at bay, so you shouldn't have too much competition for the islands' few beds. The best time to visit the Batanes is between March and May, when the weather is relatively dry.

Local officials are committed to preserving the traditional Ivatan lifestyle and promoting ecotourism. The national government designated the province the Batanes Protected Landscape and Seascape in the late 1990s.

BATAN ISLAND

pop 6700

Basco is the capital and commercial centre of Batanes. Abad St is the main drag, with a few restaurants and some *sari-sari* (neighbourhood stores) selling fruit and vegetables.

Information

Eco-Cultural Tourism Office (ECT; % 0919 369 5341; Dianong Bldg, Abad St, Basco) Office head Juliet Cataluna is a great source of information on the area and can set you up with trekking guides, homestays in the outlying towns, bangka hire and just about anything else you need. There are also multiday 'island', 'adventure' and 'heritage' tours. The office is the process of creating an association of guides trained in ecologically responsible tourism, first aid and trail maintenance and mapping.

PNB (Basco Central School, National Hwy, Basco) Changes cash and travellers cheques at a poor rate.

s3m (Castelejos St, Basco; per hr P50) Internet access.

Sights & Activities

An excellent way to explore the island is on a mountain bike, which you can hire from the ECT for P200 per day. The island's main road, called National Hwy, follows the coastline anticlockwise from Basco to Imnajbu. From Imnajbu, a gravel and grass inland trail takes you through 'Marlboro Country' and eventually brings you back to Mahatao. It's not a particularly strenuous ride but completing the full loop takes six to eight hours, depending on how many stops you make.

In Mahatao you'll see a paved road and a sign for the fishing village of Diura. The village is inhabited only during dorado-fishing season from March to June. From the end of the road in Diura, it's about a half-hour walk to the dark, narrow Crystal Cave. Enquire about accommodation at the Municipal Hall in Mahatao if you want to spend a night in Diura.

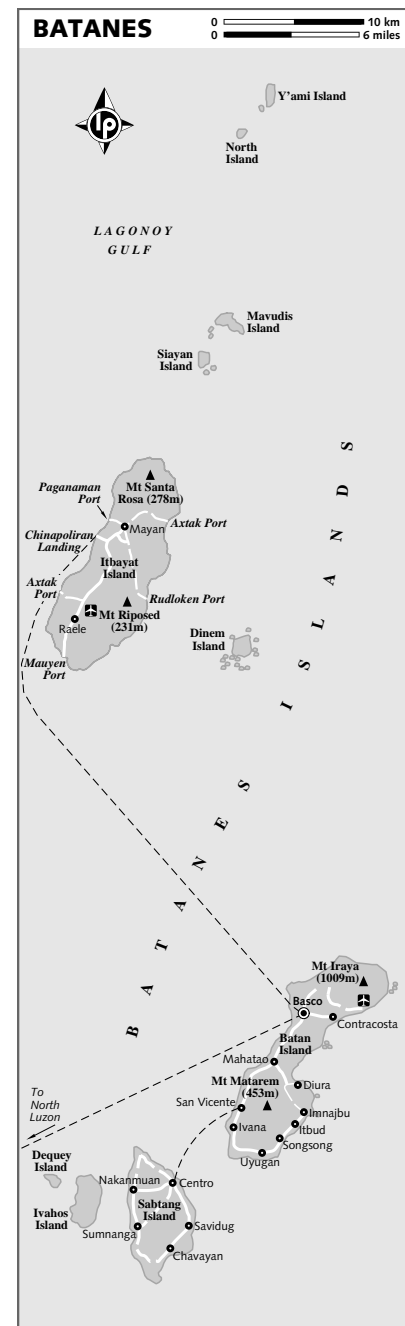
Batanes beaches are mostly strewn with pebbles or boulders, and the surf can be dangerous. The beach in Mahatao and White Beach, just south of Mahatao, are generally considered safe for swimming. North of Basco, the boulder beach at Songsong Bay is beautiful.

Mt Iraya (1009m), a dormant volcano that last erupted in 505 AD, can be climbed in about five hours and descended in three, though the summit is usually obscured by clouds. A climb to the top of Radar Tukon, the abandoned US weather station on a hilltop almost 3km from Basco, offers magnificent 360-degree views. It's 30 minutes from the wharf at Kanyuyan Beach Port in Basco to the turn-off, and then around another 40 minutes uphill.

Sleeping

ShaneDels Inn (National Hwy; r with shared bathroom per person P250) This homestay, right off Basco's main plaza, is the cosiest, cleanest place in town and by far the best value.

Batanes Seaside Lodge & Restaurant (National Hwy, Barangay Kaychanarianan; s/d with fan P450/800, s/d with air-con P800/950) The doubles at this aptly named hotel, five minutes south of Basco, are the nicest rooms in Batanes.



Ivatan Lodge (National Hwy; s/d/tr with fan P200/400/600, d with air-con P1000) This can accommodate up to 30 guests and has a roof deck. It's only a few minutes from Basco's main plaza.

Batanes Resort (National Hwy, Barangay Kaychanarianan; s/d/tr P550/672/764) The rooms here are pretty run-down but it has a good restaurant with great views of the ocean. It's about 10 minutes south of Basco.

Eating

Until recently, Basco had no restaurants. It now has several, including **Casa Napoli** (Abad St) and **Zeden Josh** (Anboy St), both of which do pizza and pasta, and **Doque Grill Xaus** (National Hwy), next to Ivatan Lodge.

Around the island there are small shops that can whip something up for you with a little advance warning. Plan to eat whatever's been plucked that day from sea or field – usually fish, root crops like *kamote* (sweet potato), and other vegetables. After a typhoon, the fish and vegetables dry up and you're left with *kamote*.

Batanes' tastiest delicacy, coconut crabs, have been dwindling in numbers of late. Do your part for the ecology and abstain from eating them.

Getting There & Away

Asian Spirit (☎ 02-855 3333 in Manila) has three flights per week to and from Manila (P5115, 1¾ hours) via Tuguegarao (P4000, 50 minutes), plus a direct flight to and from Manila on Saturday morning.

Chemtrad Airlines (☎ 078-844 3113 in Tuguegarao, 02-833 1974 in Manila) flies eight-seat planes to Batanes from Tuguegarao (P3715, one hour), departing when full, usually daily. **Pacific Air** (☎ 077-772 0663 in Laoag) operates similarly irregular eight-seaters to and from Laoag (P3200, one hour).

Both Chemtrad and Pacific Air fly from Basco to Itbayat (one way from P900, 12 minutes). These flights leave when full; there's usually at least one per day per company.

Weather permitting, round-bottomed *falowa* ferries make at least two daily trips between San Vicente on Batan, and Centro, on Sabtang (P40, one hour depending on weather conditions). There are morning and afternoon departures, the last leaving each side around 4pm. You can also hire a *falowa* to make the crossing for about

P2500. Don't be surprised when the crew members start fishing en route. Be warned: it's a very rough crossing, and poor weather could strand you in Sabtang for a couple days. Trips are less frequent in the stormy months of November to February.

Getting Around

Jepneys regularly ply the road between Basco and Imnajbu from around 4.30am to 8.30pm (P30, 45 minutes). Wait for jeepneys in front of Builder's Bank near the wharf, or flag them down on the National Hwy.

You can rent a car (P1300 per day), van (P1600) or motorbike (P800) through the ECT office.

SABTANG ISLAND

pop 1700

It's hard to believe, but travelling to Sabtang from Basco increases even further the feeling that you have somehow left the rest of the world behind.

The lifestyle here is more traditional and less influenced by the outside. With small limestone-house villages, steep mountains and deep canyons of the interior, and rocky coastline punctuated by small beaches, the scenery is even more stunning than on Batan.

The hike around the island is amazing. From Centro, where the ferry docks, hike south on the road to **Savidug** for about an hour (6km). Outside of town is an *idjang* (large rocky hill); in pre-Hispanic times, Ivatan villages were built on these hills because they were easier to defend.

It's another 2km hike from Savidug to picturesque **Chavayan**, where there's an eye-catching pastel-painted church right next to the beach. Hand-woven *vakul* (headpieces) can be picked up for P400 to P600. From here, it's a two-hour hike through the interior to **Sumnanga**, nicknamed 'Little Hong Kong' because the houses are crammed up to the shoreline. Follow the road north to **Nakanmuan** and back to Centro.

You can also hire a motorbike (P750) or private jeep (P1500 to P2000) to explore the island. Ask the helpful mayor of Centro for assistance.

If you need to stay the night, the School of Fisheries in Centro has a nice **dormitory** (dm P100). There are also a few *sari-sari* in Centro that have canteens. Nights are quiet

in Sabtang, as electricity is available for only 12 hours a day.

To get to Sabtang take a boat from Batan Island (opposite).

ITBAYAT ISLAND

pop 3600

It's a thrilling 12-minute plane ride from Basco to Itbayat, a rocky platform of an island that is the Philippines' final frontier as far as inhabited land is concerned.

Trails crisscross the centre of the island, making it a great place for trekking in good weather. There are nice views from **Mt Riposed** (231m), east of Raele. It's a beautiful half-hour walk from the main town, **Mayan** (Centro), to **Paganaman port**, where at dusk you'll see farmers returning from the fields, and fishermen with their day's catch. If you arrive at low tide, you can soak in a little natural swimming pool in the rocks next to the port.

The mayor, who can be found at the municipal building, will let you stay in **Mayan's Municipal Hall guesthouse** (beds P100) with access to a kitchen. Or you can ask around

for **Mama Eling**, who has one clean room available for the same price. Bring food and water, since the water here must be boiled before drinking.

Like Sabtang, Itbayat only gets 12 hours of electricity per day.

Chemtrad Airlines (☎ 078-844 3113 in Tuguegarao, 02-833 1974 in Manila) and **Pacific Air** (☎ 077-772 0663 in Laoag) fly from Basco to Itbayat (one way P900, 12 minutes). The flights leave when full; there's usually one per day per company. The landing strip is in the middle of a livestock farm near Raele, 10km south of Mayan. From there you will be transported to Mayan in a rustic truck with wooden wheels. Note that if the weather acts up you could get stranded on Itbayat for a few days.

There's also a weekly 'ferry' from Basco, but unless it's uncharacteristically calm, the journey is four hours of sheer hell, packed in with livestock and often seasick people.

There's no public transport on the island but there are some residents with motorbikes, or you can hire a car or dump truck from the mayor.

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