

Philippines (Republic of the Philippines)



Location: Asia

Status: UN Member Country

Capital City: Manila

Main Cities: Quezon, Manila, Caloocan, Davao, Cebu,
Zamboanga, Antipolo, Pasig, Taguig, Cagayan de Oro

Population: 100,000,000

Area: 300,000 km²

Currency: Peso (PHP)

Languages: Filipino and English

Religions: Christianity 80%

Calling code: +63

Drive on the right

Philippines are an island country that lies on the south-eastern side of Asia. Its capital city is Manila with Quezon City being the most populous city in the country. It boasts of having a total of 7107 islands and an expansive coastline that surpasses the one in the USA. Therefore, most of its points of interests are spread both in the sea and around it. The surrounding Pacific Ocean waters provide a good ground for water sports including diving and snorkelling. In addition, there is a lot of marine life and several species of coral reef to watch out for. The white sands and the soothing sunrays are very alluring to people who would like to beat the office pale. Besides the seaside attractions, there are mountains, volcanoes, caves and jungles to explore. The Filipino culture is also another distinct attraction. There is much to learn about this country. Most of its population are Roman Catholic worshippers and has a unique blend of religion and Asian culture. In addition, there are several historical sites and great food to savour. The Philippines are just as you see in the travel brochures, a country that is full of culture, tradition and hospitality.

Best time to go

The best time to visit the Philippines is in the months of December through May. During this time, a dry spell prevails in the better part of the day with rare instances of light showers. The temperature can get to as high as 35⁰C.

General Information

Passport and visa

A passport with at least six months validity from the date of entry is required. Also, you will require a visa which you can get from their embassy in your home country or through their online portal. If you intend to stay longer in this beautiful country, be sure to apply for a single entry visa, which has a limit of 3 months. This commands a certain fee and you must present your passport. If possible, get the visa in advance to avoid delays at the immigration desk.

Money

The official currency in the Philippines is the Peso (PHP). Usually, coins are in denominations of 1, 5, 10 and 25 centavos, P1 and P5. On the other hand, you can find notes in 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1000 pesos. American Express, MasterCard, Diners Club and Visa credit cards are widely accepted in the country. You can exchange money in various malls, commercial banks and hotels spread all over the country.

Post and telecommunications

The Philippines postal service is very reliable and there are also courier services widely available. Calling abroad is easy but expensive. Internet access is available in all major tourist places and you will find Wi-Fi in most cafes in more built up areas.

Transportation

Getting around in the Philippines will not be a problem. There are numerous transport options. It all depends on where you are travelling to and the money you are willing to spend. For longer distances around the island, taking a bus will be convenient. Traveling by train will not be a great alternative since there is only one in the entire island unless you do not mind the long queues. However, if your travel budget permits you can take a flight. To cover shorter distances, you can catch a tri-cycle, as many of them are available in any corner and in particular in large cities. The beauty with them is that they will get you where a vehicle cannot reach. If you are looking for comfort, taxis can be an option although they come at a price. In addition, you can choose to hire a self-drive car. Lastly, get into a boat and visit some of the sights on the smaller islands outside Manila.

Health and Safety

Climate

The Philippines experience a tropical rainforest climate. The climate features characteristically high temperatures and humidity. From June to October, heavy rainfall is encountered, which is attributed to the southeast monsoon winds that sweep across the island. From the months of December to May, no or little rainfall is experienced due to the northeast trade winds, which are usually dry. Average temperatures throughout the year fall in between 25°C to 32°C. Highlands are a bit cooler and at night, it gets chilly in particular during the dry season.

Health and wellbeing

Healthcare in the Philippines varies from high class to non-existent (many rural municipalities). Most of the national burden of health care is taken up by private health providers. Large areas of the Philippines do not have daily access to any pharmaceuticals.

Vaccinations

Before travelling to the Philippines, please ensure you have adequate protection against disease. Contact your doctor for the latest medical advice on the vaccinations you need, no less than two months before your departure.

Travel insurance (compulsory)

We do everything possible to ensure a safe and enjoyable trip. However, travel inevitably involves some risk and this should be recognised by holidaymakers. Travel insurance is a cost effective way of protecting yourself and your equipment should any problems occur such as cancelled trips, delays, medical emergencies, baggage loss or damage. It also gives you peace of mind. Please make sure your travel insurance covers all activities planned on your trip.

Culture & Customs

Etiquette and cultural differences

The culture of the Philippines is a buffet of different customs and beliefs. This is due to the prolonged period the country has been under the Spanish and American ruling dynasties. Also, the culture is influenced by their religion which is mostly Christianity. Surprisingly, of all the Christians, the largest percentage is Roman Catholics. Therefore, there are certain things that you should observe while here. This will make your vacation more fun. First, ensure to say a short thank you prayer to your creator before eating anything, regardless of the quantity. The people are very religious and you will find them praying even before taking water. Treat everybody you meet in a friendly manner and with courtesy.

In addition, remember to laugh at any joke, even when it is not really funny. Although, there are no dressing inhibitions, be sure to dress modestly to avoid gazes. The people here are very hospitable and you will find no problems interacting with them as long as you honour their customs.

Food and drink

Being an Asian country, expect seafood to be featured in various delicacies. However, other cuisines are also represented in the many restaurants that are spread throughout the islands. Usually, the local cuisine is a blend of both Hispanic and Asian culinary. Rice is the staple food in Philippines. You will find it combined with fried fish or meat. Other common dishes include marinated vegetables, grilled fish, noodles and various tasty soups. Eating is an expression of the culture so you will mostly hear 'Kain na tayo', which means 'let's eat' as the locals invite you to share their meals. Drinking is also a part of their social life. To this effect, you will find them casually taking beer, rum or gin among other homemade beverages.

Water

It is not advisable to drink tap water in the Philippines. Bottled water is recommended but do check the expiry date before opening. Ice is widely used and is produced with treated water.

Public holidays

New Year January 1

Day of Valour April 9

Maundy Thursday in April 17 but it is movable

Good Friday April 18 but movable

Labour Day May 1

Independence Day June 12

Bonifacio Day November 30 (commemorating a national figure)

Christmas day December 25

Rizal day December 30 (commemorating a national leader who was executed)

Helpful tips

Donations and gift giving

Although there is poverty in certain areas of the Philippines, please read the following points about donations and gift giving.

Do not give money to people begging, especially children. This reinforces the belief that begging is an acceptable way to make a living. If children make money from begging, their parents are less likely to send them to school. Children working on the streets are also vulnerable to abuse. Giving money and goods to beggars can accentuate an unequal relationship between locals and visitors, with tourists being seen as purely money givers.

Do not give sweets to children in villages that we visit.

Do not feel that you necessarily have to give material things. Sometimes, giving your friendship, time and interest to locals can be the best gift of all.

Tipping

Tipping is a personal matter and travellers are encouraged to tip any amount they feel is appropriate.

Pre-departure checklist

Travel insurance

Passport with at least six months validity from date of entry

Photocopy of passport

Visa or visa on arrival

Vaccinations

ATM cards/travellers cheques

All relevant tickets

Reconfirmed flights

Lightweight clothing

Long-sleeved shirts and trousers (recommended for evenings)

Electrical adaptor: 220V, 60Hz; 2 pin plugs type a,b,e,f

A small bag/backpack for day and overnight trips

Appropriate shoes for trekking, cycling and walking

Insect repellent

Sunscreen

Medication/first aid kit

Please note: Domestic airlines impose restrictions on baggage, so travel lightly where possible. Also be aware that train and boat cabins have limited space.