INSIGHT GUIDES

THE PHILIPPINES

CONTENTS

Introduction

The Best of the Philippines 6
Asia's Maverick 19
Island Nation 21

History & Features

Decisive Dates 30
Born of Fire and Water 33
Foreign Domination 37
A hero for all seasons 41
The Democratic Era 43
"Imeldific" Imelda 49
Filipinos 52
Religion in the Philippines 61
Superstitions and taboos 66
Fiesta Fantastica 69
A Thriving Arts Scene 77
Indigenous arts and handicrafts 82
Cross-cultural Cuisine 85
The Sporting Life 91
A diver's heaven 97
An Architectural Pastiche 99
Forces of nature: Volatile volcanoes 104

Places

Introduction 113
LUZON 117
Manila 121
Jeepneys 139
Manila's Environs 141
The Central Plains 159
Ilocos Region 169
Remote Batanes 181
Northeast Luzon 183
Central Cordillera 191
The fabled rice terraces of Ifugao 202
Bicol Peninsula 205
Luzon's Islands 217

■ VISAYAS 229
Eastern Visayas 231
Central Visayas 243
Western Visayas 257
Living seas: Source of life and pleasure ... 272
■ PALAWAN 277
Northern Palawan 279
Southern Palawan 289
■ MINDANAO 295
Southern and Central Mindanao 299
Mount Apo 309
Northern Mindanao and Caraga 311
Zamboanga and the Sulu Islands 323
A regional conflict 329

Travel Tips

TRANSPORTATION
Getting there 332
Getting around 333

A – Z
Accommodations 336
Addresses 336
Admission charges 336
Budgeting for your trip 336
Business hours 336
Children 337
Climate 337
Customs 337
Disabled travelers 337
Eating out 337
Etiquette 338
Health and insurance 338
Internet 339
LGBTQ travelers 339
Lost property 339
Maps 339
Media 339
Money matters 339
Postal services 340
Public holidays 340
Religious services 340
Security and crime 340
Telecommunications 341
Tourist offices 341
Visas and passports 342
Women travelers 342

LANGUAGE
Greetings 343
Shopping 343
Useful phrases 343
Numbers 343

FURTHER READING
History and politics 344
Literature and fiction 344

Maps

Philippines 114
Manila 118
Old Manila 122
Luzon 156
Vigan 175
Baguio 194
Bicol Region 206
Visayas 232
Cebu 248
Boracay 269
Palawan 280
Mindanao and Outlying Islands 296
Davao 300
Inside front cover Philippines
Inside back cover Manila

LEGEND
Insight on
Photo Story

THE BEST OF THE PHILIPPINES: TOP ATTRACTIONS



△ **Boracay.** Leave the cares of the world behind on this idyllic island of perfect beaches, luxurious resorts, and water adventures. See page 269.

▽ **Corregidor Island, Cavite.** Get an on-site crash course on how the successive armies of Spain, Japan, and the US sought to defend the Philippine capital. See page 142.





△ **Ati-Atihan festival.** The frenetic, colorful, and noisy festivities on the island of Panay each January commemorate the sale of land to 13th-century refugees from Borneo. See page 268.



△ **Ifugao rice terraces.** Perhaps the most spectacular sight in the Philippines, this amazing terraced landscape in the highlands of central Luzon was sculpted some 2,000 years ago. See page 202.



△ **Palawan.** This barely developed island in the far west of the Philippines is endowed with beautiful white-sand beaches, prime dive sites, and extensive tracts of jungle. See page 277.



△ **Intramuros, Manila.** For a sense of Manila's rich history, wander through this district of handsome Spanish colonial architecture. See page 122.



△ **Jeepneys.** A hop onto one of these brazenly embellished and garishly painted vehicles – the local answer to urban mass transit – is an essential experience for any visitor to the Philippines. See page 139.

▽ **Fort San Pedro, Cebu.** Step inside the massive stone walls to an era when the "Pearl of the South" was under siege as the Spanish struggled for a toehold in the Philippines. See page 249.



△ **Vigan, Ilocos Sur.** Stroll or take a horse-drawn carriage down some of the country's best-preserved streets from the Spanish era, stopping at cafés inside historic mansions to sip San Miguel Pilsen. See page 175.

▽ **Volcanoes.** In a country littered with volcanic peaks such as Apo, Mayon, Pinatubo, and Taal, enlist the help of a trained guide for a rewarding trek up one of the great cones. See page 104.





THE BEST OF THE PHILIPPINES: EDITOR'S CHOICE



Beach resort, Palawan.

BEST BEACHES

Baler, Aurora. A string of accessible surfing beaches halfway up Luzon's east coast. See page 189.

Boracay. The Philippines' world-famous resort has fabulous beaches, luxurious resorts, and offshore adventures. See page 269.

Dauin, Negros Oriental. Snorkelers can wade into a marine sanctuary covered with coral gardens and their colorful underwater life. See page 259.

Puerto Galera, Mindoro. A complex of beaches relatively close to Manila appeals to divers, swimmers, and seaside party-goers. See page 221.

Samal Island, Davao. This island features sleepy palm-lined, white-sand beaches just a quick hop from urban Davao. See page 304.

A typical beach near Puerto Galera.



BEST DIVE SITES

Alona Beach, Bohol. This coastal trading post of dive shops, guides, and boat rentals acts as a hub for the offshore reefs and seawalls. See page 245.

Apo Island, Negros Oriental. This islet draws scuba divers to follow schools of colorful fish swimming past the coral just offshore. See page 259.

Apo Reef National Park, Mindoro Occidental. The coral ecosystem in a 34 sq km (13 sq mile) reef, home to some 400–500 coral species, has rebounded from years of damage by dynamite fishing. See page 220.

Batangas. This well-developed resort area, two to three hours' drive from Manila, stands out for its convenience and class A beaches. See page 145.

Busuanga Island, Palawan. Dive to see dugongs and other marine life, or search for World War II shipwrecks. See page 285.

Moalboal, Cebu. A 35-meter (115ft) wall drops right off from Panagsama Beach. See page 254.

Diving off Bohol Island.



BEST WILDERNESS AREAS



The Chocolate Hills, Bohol.

Chocolate Hills, Bohol. The sunrise over these hills, named for their confectionery-like appearance in summer, leaves a lasting impression. See page 247.

Mt Banahaw, Laguna. A mountain that has been held sacred for thousands of years. See page 148.

Mayon volcano, Albay. This almost perfectly conical, and still active, volcano invites intrepid trekkers. See page 210.

Sierra Madre National Park, eastern Luzon. The country's largest national park covers grand mountain landscapes while sheltering endangered species such as the Philippine eagle. See page 189.

Sohoton National Park, Western Samar. Tour gigantic caves and underground rivers, and see natural arches. See page 239.

St Paul Underground River, Palawan. Vertical cave walls form caverns and narrow passageways along an aquamarine river deep in the jungle. See page 286.

BEST HISTORIC SITES

Butuan, Agusan del Norte. Some consider the area the cradle of Philippine civilization, and three museums showcase the local archeology. See page 318.

Kadaugan sa Mactan, Cebu. Spanish explorer Ferdinand Magellan's fatal encounter with the local hero Lapu-Lapu is dramatized on the waters off Mactan Island. See page 252.

Lights and Sounds of Rizal, Manila. National hero Jose Rizal's final hours before his execution are re-enacted in this open-air audio-visual presentation. See page 125.

Museo Dabawenyo, Davao. Free guides explain the city's history, Mindanao's indigenous groups, and local forays into modern art. See page 301.

Vigan, Ilocos Sur. Stroll among some of the country's best-preserved streets and houses from the Spanish era. See page 175.



Kayaking in Coron Bay, Calamian Islands.

BEST ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICTS

Balibago, Angeles, Pampanga. An entertainment-intensive boomtown near Clark Airbase. See page 164.

P. Burgos Street, Makati. Manila's upmarket financial district doesn't close at 5pm but rages on with a strip of lively bars. See page 133.

Ermita and Malate, Manila. This district inland from Roxas Boulevard stitches together Latin bars, gay bars, and everyday clubs with hotels and a bookstore. See pages 127, 128.

White Beach, Boracay. The hundreds of resorts, bars, and restaurants throw what amounts to a party along the palm-studded beach at night. See page 269.

White Beach, Boracay.





Bottlenose dolphin at Ocean Adventure.



Ati-Atihan Festival.

BEST FAMILY HANGOUTS

Avilon Zoo, Rizal. Northeast of Quezon City, this is the best zoo in the country. See page 154.

Museo Pambata (Children's Museum), Manila. Explores themes ranging from the environment and science to the human body. See page 127.

Ocean Adventure, Subic Bay. Marine theme park with dolphins, whales, sea lions, and plenty of interaction. See page 167.

Manila Ocean Park. A visit starts with the indoor aquarium, showcasing marine life from around the world, and ends with a seal show outside. See page 125.

BEST CULTURAL ICONS

Ati-Atihan Festival, Kalibo. At the most famous and raucous of Philippine festivals, the line between spectators and participants gets increasingly blurred as the day progresses. See page 268.

Batanes. Spend a night in one of the far-flung villages in the islands off Luzon's north coast to experience one of the country's most isolated cultures. See page 181.

Jeepneys. A ride on this often brazenly embellished and garishly painted mode of transportation is an essential Philippines experience. See page 139.

Moriones Festival, Marinduque. A spectacular festival featuring men wearing masks (*moriones*) and colorfully dressed as Roman soldiers. See page 222.

Metropolitan Museum of Manila, Metro Manila. The works of local artists are on display along with gold artifacts and pottery dating to the 8th century. See page 129.



Decoration on a Manila jeepney.



Durian fruit seller, Magsaysay Park, Davao.

Divisoria Market, Manila.

BEST SHOPPING

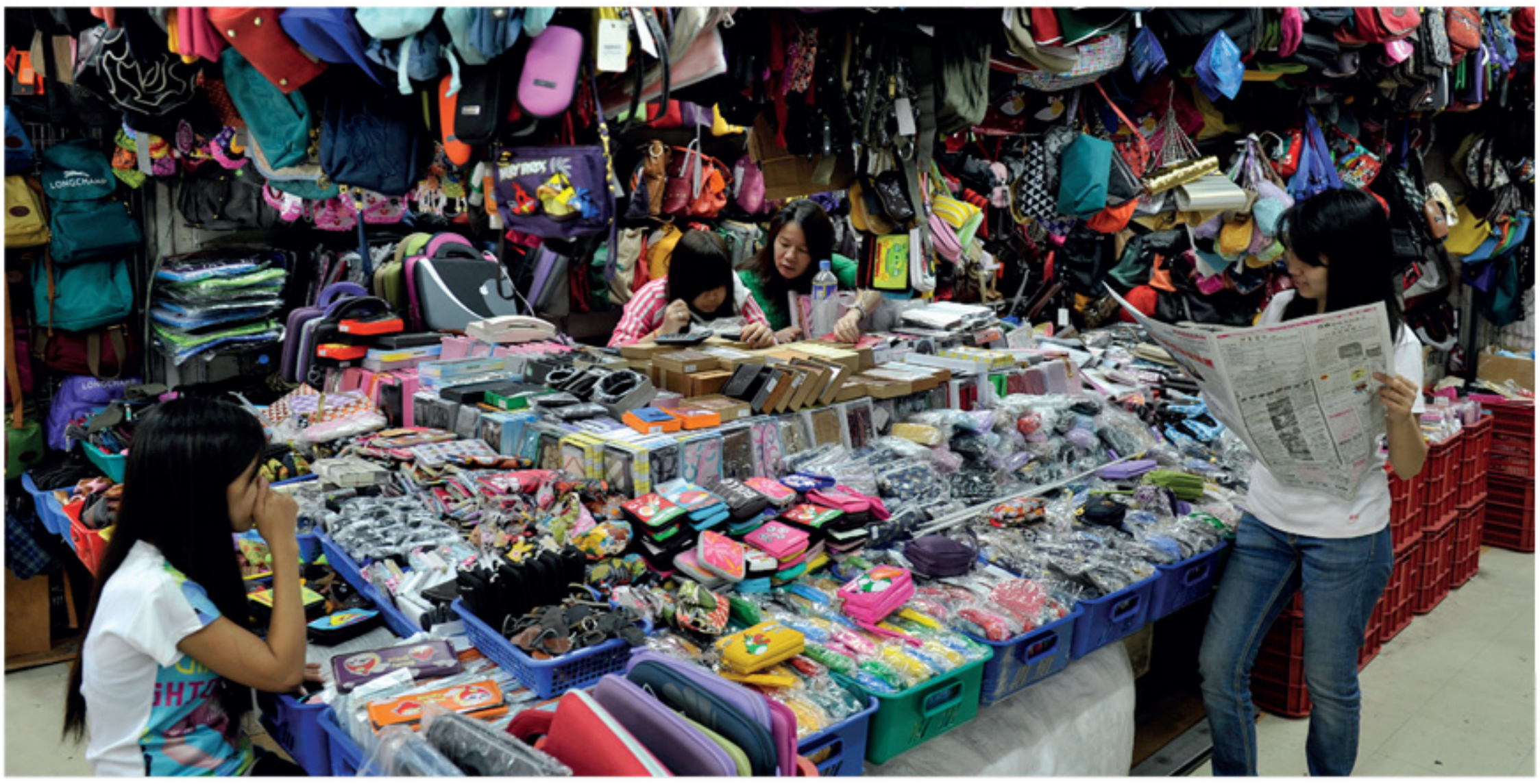
City Market, Baguio. Look for unusual weavings, carvings, and other crafts at this crossroads of the Cordilleran mountain tribes. See page 194.

Batak Village, Puerto Princesa. This indigenous Batak community along the highway sells basketry, kitchenware, and musical instruments. See page 283.

Divisoria, Manila. An intense shopping experience awaits at this bargain-basement flea market with thousands of stalls. See page 136.

Greenhills Shopping Center, Manila. Look for freshwater and South China Sea pearls as well as cheap electronic goods. See page 134.

SM Mall of Asia, Manila. The Philippines' fourth largest commercial complex testifies to the favored Filipino leisure pursuit of shopping. Outdoor eateries serve local cuisine. See page 134.



TRAVELERS' TIPS

Book ahead whenever possible. Online hotel bookings can lower room rates and guarantee a spot during holidays. Advanced purchases of ferry tickets save time standing in long lines, followed by disappointment if the boat is full.

Be assertive with taxi drivers. By law, taxi drivers should take you to a destination for the metered fare, but many won't. When a driver quotes you a set price to a destination (contrata), it is usually around three times the normal fare.

Be firm with touts. Don't be pressured by touts, such as tricycle-taxi drivers, at airports and bus and boat terminals. Be firm about your destination, agree on the price before you begin a journey, and keep in mind that any tout's first stated price is usually bloated to test how much he can get away with. It's acceptable to bargain down the price of a ride, likewise almost everything else for sale.

Count what comes back. Someone who is out to cheat may try to pocket the difference between a price and the amount tendered. Count your change. Errors, usually honest ones, are common.

Prepare for outages. The internet is often down in the Philippines and power goes off regularly in some regions.