



Philippines

Introduction

Official Name: Republic of the Philippines
Nationality: Filipino
Area: 300,000 square kilometers (115,831 square miles)
Languages: Filipino (official), English (official), eight major dialects of Filipino: Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon or Ilonggo, Bicol, Waray, Pampango, Pangasinan
Currency: Philippine peso (PHP)
Location: Southeastern Asia; archipelago comprised of 7,107 islands between the Philippine Sea and the South China Sea

Statistical Information

Population	91 million
0-14 years	34.5 percent
15-64 years	61.3 percent
65+ years	4.1 percent
Birth rate	24 births/1,000
Death rate	5 deaths/1,000
Fertility rate	3.05 children/woman
Pop. growth rate	1.76 percent
Life expectancy	70.5 years
Literacy	92.6 percent
HIV/AIDS rate	less than 0.1 percent
Below poverty line	40 percent
Ethnic groups	28.1 percent Tagalog 13.1 percent Cebuano 9 percent Ilocano 7.6 percent Bisaya 7.5 percent Hiligaynon Ilonggo 6 percent Bikol 3.4 percent Waray 25.3 percent other
Religion	80.9 percent Roman Catholic 5 percent Muslim 2.8 percent Evangelical 2.3 percent Iglesia ni Kristo 2 percent Aglipayan 7 percent other

Economy

Over the years, the Philippines has gone from being one of the richest countries in Asia to one of the poorest. After World War II, the economy grew rapidly, but years of mismanagement and political instability during the Marcos years caused the economy to shrink drastically. The current government is doing its best to restore economic stability, but faces the challenges of widespread poverty, aging infrastructure, poor education systems, and trade and investment barriers. Despite these many challenges, the country has experienced small percentages of economic growth over the past few years.

Government

Capital: Manila

The Philippines is a democratic republic, led by a president, who is elected to serve a single six-year term. The legislature consists of a two-house Congress, or Kongreso. Members of the 24-seat Senate are popularly elected to serve six-year terms. The House of Representatives provides proportional representation, similar to the U.S. House of Representatives, so the number of representatives varies. Representatives are elected by popular vote to serve three-year terms. As a result of the 2007 election there are 237 seats filled in the House, 218 of which represent districts. The remaining 19 seats represent special minorities. The Constitution of the Philippines sets the maximum number of seats in the House of Representatives at 250.

Climate

The Philippines is a tropical country astride the typhoon belt, subject to yearly monsoon seasons. March to May is hot and dry; June to October is rainy; November to February is cool. Average temperatures are from 78°F to 90°F, with humidity around 77 percent.

Environmental Concerns

The Philippines experiences uncontrolled deforestation, especially in watershed areas. Other issues include air and water pollution in major urban areas, soil erosion, coral reef degradation, and pollution of coastal mangrove swamps that are important fish breeding grounds.

History

Early indigenous peoples in the Philippines were of Malay and Polynesian origin. They were a people experienced on the seas, and by the ninth to the twelfth centuries A.D. they had established trade relationships with India, China, and Japan, and with Islamic merchants. As the peoples were spread out over many small islands, they never developed a central government. The basic unit of settlement was the *barangay*, a kinship group headed by a *datu*, or chief. Within each barangay were three distinct social strata: the *maharlika*, or nobles, which included the datu; the *timawa*, or freemen; and a dependant group, which included slaves, women, and those who had lost freeman status due to crime or debt.

Muslim traders from Indonesia brought Islam to the Philippines. By the 13th century Islam was established in the Sulu Archipelago; from there it spread to Mindanao and then to the Manila area. Despite the influence of Islam, traditional animism remained the main religion in the Philippines. Islamic immigrants brought with them the concept of territorial states ruled by rajahs or sultans, but the concept of a political state did not catch on among the majority of Filipinos, who were still living in barangay settlements when the Spanish arrived.

In 1521, the explorer Ferdinand Magellan landed on the island of Cebu and claimed the lands for Spain. He introduced Roman Catholicism and developed friendly relations with several tribes and chieftains, but was killed in a dispute with a chieftain named Lapu-Lapu.

Over the next several decades, other Spanish expeditions set foot in the Philippines. In 1543, Ruy López de Villalobos gave the islands of Samar and Leyte the name Las Islas Felipinas, after King Philip II of Spain. The name would later be applied to the entire archipelago.

In 1655, the conquistador Miguel López de Legazpi led an expedition to the island of Cebu. After defeating the local Muslim ruler, he established a capital at Manila, which became the center of Spanish government in the region. The Philippines

became the Spanish East Indies, despite Portuguese opposition to Spanish presence in the area.

Occupation of the majority of the islands proved relatively easy, since the Filipino tribes offered little resistance. The main problem the Spanish faced was Muslim resistance, especially in Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago.

One of Spain's objectives in its new colony was to convert the natives to Roman Catholicism. The outcome was a Roman Catholic majority in the lowland areas, from which the southern Muslims and the upland peoples of Luzon remained detached.

The Spanish built on traditional village organization, allowing local leaders to continue to govern under Spanish leadership. This indirect system of ruling helped create a new Filipino upper class, called the *principalia*, who had wealth and status. The Spanish also replaced the Filipino idea of communal land use with the concept of private ownership of land and titled nobility.

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 cut travel time to Spain and prompted the rise of the *ilustrados*, an enlightened Filipino upper class, since young Filipinos were now able to study in Europe. The ilustrados called first for adequate representation to the Spanish Cortes and later for independence. The most famous ilustrado, José Rizal, wrote two novels which inspired the independence movement. Andrés Bonifacio founded the Katipunan, a secret society whose purpose was to overthrow Spanish rule in the Philippines.

The Philippine Revolution began in 1896. The Spanish government executed Rizal for treason, linking him to the outbreak of the revolution. The Katipunan split into two separate and warring factions, which culminated in the assassination of one leader by the other. The remaining revolutionary leader, Emilio Aguinaldo, agreed to a truce with the Spanish and was exiled to Hong Kong. Several revolutionary generals refused to comply with the truce agreement, and armed conflict resumed, coming from nearly every province in the colony.

In 1898, the U.S.S. Maine exploded in Havana Harbor in Cuba, setting off the Spanish-American War. After U.S. Commodore George Dewey defeated the Spanish at Manila, the U.S. invited the exiled Aguinaldo to return to the Philippines. He rallied the Filipinos, who took control of the entire island of Luzon by the time U.S. soldiers arrived. On June 12, 1898, Aguinaldo declared Philippine independence.

In the Battle of Manila, American forces seized the city of Manila from Spain. Filipino forces were prevented from entering the captured city, which put an end to Filipino-American cooperation. In the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the Spanish-American War, Spain was forced to hand over the Philippines to the United States. The United States did not recognize the Philippines as an independent nation, and its continuing presence in the islands angered Filipinos.

The Philippine-American War officially broke out on February 4, 1899, when two American soldiers on patrol killed three Filipino soldiers in a suburb of Manila. The poorly equipped Filipino soldiers were easily subjugated by the Americans in open warfare, but Filipino soldiers relied on guerilla warfare, where they became formidable opponents. Atrocities were committed on both sides, and over the next two years the revolutionaries, led by Aguinaldo, suffered the loss of their capital city and one of their best generals. When the Americans captured Aguinaldo himself on March 23, 1901, he swore allegiance to the United States and issued a proclamation officially ending the war. However, insurgent resistance continued for years in various parts of the Philippines, especially in Muslim territory.

The United States established a civil government in the Philippines in 1901, with the understanding that they were preparing the islands for eventual independence. At first, the U.S. was reluctant to delegate authority to the Filipinos, but during his presidency Woodrow Wilson established a plan that would put the Philippines on the track to independence.

In 1934, the United States and the Philippines both passed the Tydings-McDuffie Act, which established the Commonwealth of the Philippines, providing for a peaceful, ten-year transition to full independence. A new constitution was approved and the Commonwealth established in 1935 with Manuel Quezon as its first president.

On December 8, 1941, just ten hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Japan launched an attack on the Clark Air Base in Pampanga. The defending Philippine and American troops, under General MacArthur, were forced to withdraw to the Bataan Peninsula. Manila declared itself an open city, abandoning all defensive efforts to prevent destruction by the invading Japanese, who occupied the city on January 2, 1942. Defensive efforts continued until the final surrender of Philippine and American forces in April and May of 1942. Most of

the 80,000 prisoners of war captured by the Japanese were forced to undertake the infamous Bataan Death March to a prison camp 105 kilometers to the north, causing the deaths of some 10,000 Filipinos and 1,200 Americans. MacArthur was sent to Australia, where he began to plan a return to the Philippines.

The Japanese set up a new government in the Philippines, declaring the country an independent republic in 1943. The Japanese-backed president, José Laurel, proved to be highly unpopular. Filipinos continued to oppose Japanese occupation through large-scale guerilla resistance. They were so successful that by the end of World War II, Japan controlled only 12 out of 48 provinces.

MacArthur returned to the Philippines with Allied forces on October 20, 1944. Allied forces landed in several spots around the islands and pushed toward Manila. The fighting continued until Japan's formal surrender on September 2, 1945.

Elections were held in April of 1946, with Manuel Roxas becoming the first president of the newly independent Republic of the Philippines. The United States renounced its claim of sovereignty over the Philippines on July 4, 1946, although the Philippines remained economically dependent upon the United States.

World War II had left the Philippines damaged and demoralized, with hundreds of thousands of casualties. During the next few presidencies, the government pushed for land reforms, resettling poor people from the overcrowded Catholic north into the southern Muslim territories. While this relieved population pressure, it contributed to rising religious tension in the south. The Philippines also sought closer relations with Asian nations such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

In 1965 Ferdinand Marcos won the presidency and initiated programs which bolstered the economy. His programs to improve infrastructure and education systems were so successful that he was reelected in 1969 for a second term. Corruption within the Philippine legislature caused problems for Marcos as he tried to push through more reforms. As a result, economic growth slowed during his second term. Crime and civil disobedience increased; the Moro National Liberation Front fought for an independent Muslim state in Mindanao, while the Communist Party of the Philippines gained power elsewhere.

Rising waves of lawlessness and threats of Communist and Muslim uprisings prompted Marcos

to declare martial law on September 21, 1972. He closed down Congress and media establishments, curtailed freedom of the press and other civil liberties, and arrested political opponents and militant activists. Initially, the economy began to recover and crime rates plunged, but rampant corruption within the Marcos government eventually caused a decline in development and economy.

After allegations of election fraud, Marcos was replaced with Corazon Aquino, the widow of one of Marcos' political opponents. Her government worked to restore civil liberties and create a new, stronger constitution, but a series of natural disasters further crippled the economy.

The return of democracy and governmental reforms since 1986 have been hindered by massive national debt, government corruption, coup attempts, a Muslim separatist rebellion, and communist insurgency. The current administration of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has been hounded by accusations of election fraud and corruption and has survived several coup attempts, the most recent being in March of 2006.

Ethnic Groups

Ethnic identity in the Philippines is fluid, and ethnic or tribal intermarriage is fairly common. Many Filipinos identify themselves based on language, geographic region, or ancestry. There are eight major divisions of native Filipinos, although many smaller ethnic groups and local divisions exist.

Tagalog—Tagalogs are the second largest ethnic Filipino group. Formerly a tattooing tribe, the Tagalogs accepted influence from Hispanic, Chinese, and American cultures. Today, they are agriculturalists or fishermen. They place high importance on conduct and respect, and they are also considered a brave and courageous people. Culinary skills are valued within the Tagalog community; women (and sometimes men) are taught to cook at a very early age. Most Tagalogs are Christian, and their culture forms the backbone of Filipino society. The national language, Filipino, is a standardized form of Tagalog.

Cebuano—The term Cebuano refers to people whose native tongue is Cebuano (a Bisayan language), but more specifically those who live in the province of Cebu. Cebuanos were the first native Filipinos to come into contact with Europeans, and as a result are predominantly Roman Catholic, although

they have accepted some influence from Chinese religions.

Ilocano—Ilocanos are the third largest Filipino ethnic group. They are originally indigenous to the northwestern coast of Luzon, but recent population pressure has pushed them out of their ancestral homeland. The Spanish conquistadors described the Ilocanos as being more barbarous than the Tagalogs; they were one of the first tribes to revolt against Spanish rule during the colonial period. Ilocanos are characterized as being hardworking and frugal, living rather spartan everyday lives, and placing little importance on material possessions. Ilocanos also display a great deal of respect and humility in their relations with others.

Bisaya—The Bisayans are the largest Filipino ethnic group, and actually encompass several other language groups. Within the Bisaya family is Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Waray. Bisayans occupy the central Bisayan Islands and Mindanao. In precolonial times, the Bisaya were animists who were known as traders and raiders.

Hiligaynon—Also called the Ilonggo, the Hiligaynons are part of the Bisaya language family. They are indigenous to the large coastal plain of East Panay Island, though they have migrated to other parts of the Philippines.

Bikol—The Bicolanos are the fifth-largest Filipino ethnic group. They are indigenous to the southeastern peninsula of Luzon. Their language, referred to as Bikol or Bicolano, is fragmented into various dialects which are mutually incomprehensible to speakers of other Bikol dialects. The majority of Bicolanos are devout Roman Catholics. They are mainly noted for their use of chili peppers and coconut milk in their cuisine.

Waray—The Waray people are indigenous to Samar and Leyte, and are a subdivision of the Bisaya group. Warays are known as fun-loving people, fond of music, dancing, food, and jewelry, especially gold. They are also known for their mat weaving; maroon and green are the distinguishing colors. The Waray people are considered brave warriors.

Moro—The term Moro refers to various ethnic and linguistic groups in Mindanao who adhere to Islam. They have their own system of education and justice based in Cotabato City, separate from the government in Manila, called the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

Religion

The vast majority of Filipinos are Roman Catholic. Protestantism was introduced by American soldiers, who arrived in the Philippines in 1899. Other Christian groups include the Aglipay Church (Philippine Independent Church), and the Iglesia ni Kristo (Church of Christ). The Aglipay Church recently signed a covenant with the Anglican Church.

There is a significant Muslim population in the southern parts of the Philippines, most notably in Mindanao. Filipino Muslims follow the Sunni tradition. They remain very detached from the Roman Catholic majority of Filipinos, and even retain domestic autonomy from the central Philippine government.

The influence of tribal animism still pervades much of Filipino life, and is a source of ancestral pride, even among Christians and Muslims.

Culture

Food—Rice is a staple of the Filipino diet, and is served with nearly every meal. Fish and shellfish also constitute a large part of Filipino cuisine. Garlic is considered healthy and is added to many foods. In general, Filipino food is not spicy. Filipinos do not use knives; it is acceptable to either use a fork and spoon or eat directly with the hands. Filipinos are also very fond of sweets, and Coca-Cola is a popular drink. Many kinds of fruit are available in the Philippines, including mangoes and both red and green varieties of bananas. Fast-food restaurants are gaining popularity, though all fast-food meals include rice. French fries are usually on the menu, too, but most Filipinos use a banana ketchup rather than tomato. Dog meat is a delicacy throughout the country.

Shopping—Malls and stores with prepackaged food will have fixed prices, but open-air markets are conducted on a bartering system. Shopping malls and other Western-type stores can be found in most provincial capitals and also in Manila, while markets occur every day in larger towns and once or twice a week in small towns or villages.

Social class—There is a large gap between the richest two percent of the population and the masses who live in poverty. The Filipino middle class does not attempt to make societal changes, because they feel obligated to the upper class. Social status is shown through material possessions. Since many

families are too poor to own a car, owning a car is a clear sign of status, as is upholstered furniture, an abundance of electrical appliances, and area rugs.

Sports—Filipinos enjoy watching professional basketball, both in American and Filipino leagues. Basketball courts are found in every school and barangay, or town. Cockfighting is also very popular among men. Mah-jongg, a Chinese game played with tiles, is popular with women.

Marriage—Marriage includes both a civil and a religious ceremony. Each wedding has sponsors, friends and relatives who have status within the community. The number of sponsors a couple has attests to their popularity. It also provides financial help, since each sponsor is expected to contribute a substantial amount of cash to the new couple. Arranged marriages are not part of Filipino life, but men are expected to be married by their mid- or late twenties. If a woman reaches the age of 32 without marrying, she is considered past marriageable age. Long engagements are common in the Philippines, sometimes lasting five to seven years. During this time, each member of the couple becomes established in a job, pays for the education of younger siblings, and acquires necessary household items.

Family—Familial units are very strong in the Philippines. A home may include children from the extended family. Cousins are referred to as brothers and sisters, and nieces and nephews are considered daughters and sons. Grandparents provide childcare while mothers and fathers work.

Education—Filipinos highly value education as the way to succeed in life. Education is compulsory through age 12, but many poor children do not attend. Both primary (six years) and secondary (four years) public schools are free, but may lack electricity and supplies. Private schools charge fees but have better reputations and smaller class sizes than the public schools. School children in the Philippines must wear uniforms: white blouses and pleated skirts for girls, white shirts and pants for boys. Public school children wear dark blue pants and skirts; each private school has its own color.

Etiquette—Filipinos are very concerned with losing face. Being corrected or correcting someone in public is not acceptable. Thus, a person will nearly always say “yes” even when he means “no” or “maybe.” Other Filipinos understand when a request is not fulfilled, because refusing it would have caused the individual to lose face. Filipinos are not highly time-conscious. A planned meeting will usually be late, or will not happen at all. Filipinos pride themselves on their hospitality. They will go out of their way to help visitors and even bring them to a destination. They are very polite and always use full titles and positions when referring to those above them. Schoolchildren refer to teachers as “sir” or “ma’am.”

Dress

The majority of Filipinos today dress in a Western style. Remote Filipino tribes have been less affected by Western culture, so in areas of the mountains of Luzon and in Mindanao it is possible to see Filipinos wearing more traditional, very colorful clothing.

One traditional piece of clothing is the *barong Tagalog*. This is a translucent pearl white shirt worn over another shirt, usually made of pineapple or banana fibers. Filipino men wear barong Tagalogs at formal gatherings and celebrations.

Travel/Transportation

Travel within the Philippine archipelago is possible through a variety of ways. Boats and ferries, planes, buses, and cars are all possible sources of transportation, although most visitors choose not to rent a private car because of the crowded roads and reckless native drivers. If you do choose to drive, driving off paved roads and out of main cities is dangerous at night and should be avoided.

Travelers should apply for an international driving permit (IDP) if they intend to drive in the Philippines. An IDP is a document which allows a motorist to operate a vehicle in another nation when accompanied by a valid driver’s license from their own country. An IDP is not a license in and of itself; it is a translation of an American or Canadian driver’s license.

Americans can apply for an IDP in the United States or Canada before they travel. The American Automobile Association (AAA) and the American Automobile Touring Alliance are the only organizations in the U.S. authorized by the State Department to issue IDPs. The Canadian Automobile

Association (CAA) is authorized to issue IDPs to Canadian citizens. The cost of an IDP is under \$20; the application will need to be accompanied by two passport-sized photos.

Illness/Injury

Major cities in the Philippines are able to provide adequate medical care, but may not meet standards of sanitation, medical care, and facilities provided in the United States. In rural areas, medical care is very limited.

Most hospitals in the Philippines will require a cash down payment on estimated fees before admitting a patient. Treatment in the Philippines can cost thousands of dollars. In some cases, Filipino hospitals have withheld lifesaving treatment for nonpayment of bills. Hospitals will frequently refuse to discharge a patient until their medical bill is paid in full.

Crime

As in most major metropolitan centers, crime is a problem in metro Manila. Confidence rackets, pickpocketing, and credit card fraud are common. Be wary of individuals who seem to be overly friendly and interested in your affairs. Do not accept food, drink, or rides in private vehicles from strangers. There have been several kidnappings and assaults of foreigners in the Manila area.

Taxis are the recommended form of travel while in country. However, avoid entering a taxi that has already accepted another passenger, and make sure the driver runs the meter. If the driver is unwilling to comply with your request, it is best to wait for another taxi. The light rail system, jeepneys (old U.S. Army surplus jeeps used as taxis), and buses should be avoided for safety reasons.

Be careful with your credit card as well. A common form of credit card fraud in the Philippines involves running a card through an electronic device that records the information stored in its magnetic strip, including PIN numbers. The information is then used to make fraudulent purchases. To avoid becoming a victim of this type of credit card fraud, do not let your credit card leave your sight.

You should also be wary if you are approached by someone claiming to be selling U.S. Federal Reserve Notes or U.S. securities. A common confidence racket in the Philippines is the attempted sale of fraudulent U.S. securities to unwary foreigners or residents.

Safety and Security

Travelers anywhere in the Philippines should be aware of the threat of terrorism, although the southern island of Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago are the highest-risk areas.

Kidnap-for-ransom gangs operate in the Philippines. In January 2007, one such gang abducted two American children from their home in Mindanao. Another terrorist organization, the New People's Army (NPA), operates in the Luzon area and, although it has not threatened Westerners in several years, could potentially threaten them with extortion.

Islamic terrorist groups, such as the Abu Sayyaf Group, the Jema'ah Islamiyah, and other groups that have broken away from the mainstream Moro Islamic Liberation Front, have been responsible for bombings resulting in property damage, injuries, and deaths. Although Mindanao and the Sulu Archipelago in the southern Philippines are the highest-risk areas for Islamic terrorist groups, other areas of the Philippines are not immune. In August of 2007, two improvised explosive devices were found in Manila City. While they did not explode, the presence of these IEDs illustrates the ongoing security risks throughout the entire country.

Entry/Exit Requirements

U.S. citizens do not need a visa to travel to the Philippines. You will need a U.S. passport with at least six months of validity from the date you enter the Philippines, and a return ticket to the States or an onward ticket to another country as proof that you do not intend to remain indefinitely in the country. Upon presentation of these items, Philippine officials will annotate your U.S. passport with an entry visa valid for 21 days from the date of entry. If you wish to stay longer than 21 days, you must apply for an extension at the Philippine Bureau of Immigration and Deportation.

Visitors who overstay their visas are subject to fines and detention by Philippine immigration officials. The State Department urges American citizens to remain aware of their visa status and strictly adhere to immigration laws and regulations while in the Philippines to avoid trouble with Philippine authorities.

Immunizations

There are no required immunizations for entrance into the Philippines for travelers coming from the United States. If you are entering the Philippines from a country that is at risk for yellow fever, the

Philippine government requires proof of yellow fever inoculation.

The Philippine islands are considered high risk for hepatitis A, hepatitis B, typhoid, and Japanese encephalitis. You may want to consider some or all of these vaccinations if traveling to the Philippines. Three separate injections over a period of six months are required for full effectiveness of a hepatitis B vaccine, so make sure to plan ahead.

Some regions of the Philippines, mainly low-lying areas, are at-risk areas for malaria. Talk to a travel health professional to determine if you should take a course of antimalarial drugs before traveling to the Philippines.

Dengue fever, a disease carried by the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, is present in the Philippines. There is no vaccine for dengue fever, so protecting yourself against mosquito bites is the best form of prevention.

Special Circumstances

Relationship fraud is a persistent problem in the Philippines, and it is not uncommon for Filipinos to enter into marriages with Americans for immigration purposes. It is illegal to enter into a marriage contract with the purpose of facilitating immigration to the United States for an alien. In addition, marriage to a U.S. citizen does not automatically confer either U.S. citizenship or eligibility for entry into the United States.

The Philippines is a volcano-, typhoon-, and earthquake-prone country. From May through December the risk of typhoons and flash flooding is highest. Flooding can cause road delays and cut off bridges. Typhoons within the vicinity of the Philippines can interrupt air and sea travel within the country. Volcanic activity is frequent, as the Philippine islands are volcanic in origin; the Philippine government will issue alerts for specific volcanoes in times of activity. Earthquakes also occur throughout the country, with varying degrees of severity.

Electricity

The Philippines uses 220V/60Hz power. American appliances will need a power converter since they are designed to run on 120V/60Hz. The majority of Philippine outlets are designed to accept plug types A, B, or C, although type A is the most common. American appliances all use either type A or B plugs, so Philippine outlets should accept most American plugs.