



# PHILIPPINES

## COUNTRY GUIDE



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# KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

## Communications

**\*\*To call numbers in The Philippines from the U.S. dial + 404 + [telephone number]**

The telephone number should include the 1-digit area code for the capital, Manila, and 3-digit area codes for all other areas.

**Wifi:** In most places you will visit in The Philippines, wifi will be available. Speed, bandwidth, and availability will likely be less reliable than you are used to. Oftentimes, connection is stronger in the lobby of hotels than in individual rooms.

**International Calls:** If you are in The Philippines and trying to reach a number outside of the country, dial 00 before dialing the country code and local number.

**Staying connected:** Here are the most common methods for making local/international calls:

1. **Smart Phone apps:** Apps such as Skype, WhatsApp, and Viber (when Wifi is available).
2. **Getting an international calling package:** Setting up international coverage from your cell phone provider for the duration of your trip is often the simplest option and the best to avoid roaming charges.
3. **Use a local phone/ SIM card:** Best for making calls within The Philippines as international calls can get expensive. Local SIM cards are inexpensive, can be found at a variety of stores, and often have pay-as-you-go plans where you can “top up” your credit for use in the country. Please be aware of any requirements your phone has in order to accept the local SIM cards (i.e. size of SIM card, jailbroken, etc). Please also let us know in advance if you would like assistance purchasing a local phone.
4. **Call from hotel or internet café:** Please be advised that some hotels impose a surcharge that can be more than double the cost of international calls. Be sure to check the hotel policy before placing an international call from a hotel.

## Passport

Travelers to The Philippines should ensure that the validity of their passports extends at least 6 months beyond the end of their intended stay, and should have at least 2 blank (unstamped) visa pages in their passport to enter the country. The last 2 amendment pages are unacceptable for visas and immigration stamps. Note that you will need to renew your passport if you are out of Visa pages, as the State Department no longer provides additional pages. If you need to renew your passport, please do so as soon as possible. We also recommend travelers scan a copy of your passport and email it to yourself. This way you always have a copy if something happens to it while traveling.

## Visa/Tourist Card

U.S. citizens may enter The Philippines for purposes of tourism without a visa if they present:

- a valid U.S. passport and
- a return ticket to the United States or an onward ticket to another country.

Upon your arrival, immigration authorities will stamp an entry visa valid for 30 days on your passport. If you plan to stay longer than 30 days, you must apply for an extension at the Philippine [Bureau of Immigration \(BI\)](#).

If you do not hold a U.S. passport feel free to reach out to the Elevate Destinations team as soon as possible about how to acquire a visa to The Philippines.

## Travel Insurance

Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that all travelers have travel insurance for any trip they wish to take with us. Please note that some insurance options require purchase within 24 hours of making payment for your trip. We encourage you to review your travel insurance options before making payment to Elevate Destinations.

Elevate Destinations is partnered with the Travel Insurance Center, a broker of travel protection products. For assistance, contact Alan Lightbody, Agent Representative, E-mail [alightbody@travelinsurancecenter.com](mailto:alightbody@travelinsurancecenter.com), Toll Free 1-866-979-6753 Ext. 3648, or Direct 402-343-3648.

Guests may acquire travel insurance through the Travel Insurance Center, or any other travel insurance company of their choosing. Elevate Destinations recommends that travelers evaluate the insurance options available for their needs, and inquire with providers about insurance that will provide coverage if the trip needs to be cancelled.

## Immunizations

Prior to travel, Elevate Destinations strongly recommends that you look into recommended immunizations for your time in The Philippines. Given that we are not a licensed Health Care provider, we cannot advise travelers on which immunizations they may need. We recommend that all travelers do the following:

- a) Consult with a travel clinic or your personal physician regarding immunizations and other precautions you may need to take in order to participate in this journey. You will need to do this well in advance of your trip as some vaccinations require time to take effect, and you may need to allow time between a series of shots.
- b) Visit [the CDC Website for The Philippines](#) to view recommended vaccines and medicines, travel health notices for the region, and other tips for staying healthy and safe.

## Other Health Considerations

This will be an amazing journey, but as with all travel, a spirit of adventure and a degree of flexibility will enhance your enjoyment of this program. This will be a relatively active program, with considerable walking and a number of travel days with early departures and activities scheduled throughout the day.

We recommend a medium level of physical fitness, as some of the drives may be long, with sections of the road unpaved. For the most satisfying experience, and in fairness to your fellow travelers, please note that this tour requires the following:

- Ability to walk at least one mile without difficulty
- Ability to spend extended periods of time on your feet
- Ability to climb sets of stairs without assistance
- Ability to keep pace with an active group of travelers and to be on time for all scheduled activities

## Safety Recommendations

Our staff will give you current briefings on safety while in-country, but here are some basic ground rules for safety while traveling:

- Avoid flashing money. Be mindful of your belongings at all time. Keep bags in front of you in crowds, and on your lap when at restaurants.
- Pay attention: avoid walking around with your smartphone in hand.
- Be vigilant when crossing roads - Pedestrians do not have the right of way.
- Stick with the group.
- Always make sure that others know of your whereabouts and movements.
- Avoid street protests or large gatherings.
- Do not wear expensive or sentimentally valuable jewelry while traveling.
- We encourage you to register with STEP (see below).

### *Smart Traveler Tip!*

We recommend that all travelers from the USA sign-up for the [State Department's Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#)! This is a free service provided by the U.S. Government to U.S. citizens who are traveling to, or living in, a foreign country. STEP allows you to enter information about your upcoming trip abroad so that the Department of State can better assist you in case of an emergency. Enrolling in this program has enormous benefits in case of an emergency while abroad:

- You will receive information from the Embassy about safety conditions in your destination
- Enrolling lets the U.S. Embassy in that country know that you are there and helps them contact you in an emergency, whether natural disaster, civil unrest, or family-related.

## Documentation

In case of emergency, it is advisable to record all of your important information on one sheet of paper, photocopy it, and distribute a few copies in your luggage, your money belt, and amongst relatives or friends at home. Also email a scanned copy to yourself to have available online anywhere. Here are some ideas on what to include:

- A photo copy of your passport,
- Travel insurance policy details and 24-hour emergency number,
- Details of relatives/friends and your primary care physician to be contacted in an emergency,
- Bank and credit card details, camera serial numbers etc.

## Money

The local currency in the Philippines is the The Philippine Peso (PHP). Click [here](#) to see the current [exchange rate](#). Notes are issued in denominations of ₱20, ₱50, ₱100, ₱500, ₱1000. Coins are issued in denominations of ₱1, ₱5, ₱10. In some cases, you can also use US currency in the Philippines and expect that shopkeepers will give you change in PHP.

**For your extra personal costs and shopping, bringing USD \$30-\$50 per day is a good rule of thumb.**

### *Smart Traveler Tip!*

Be sure to notify your bank and credit card companies of your travel plans, in case they view your activity as fraudulent and put a block on your card.

The small amount of local currency you may need during your stay in the Philippines can be obtained at authorized facilities (such as ATMS, hotels, banks and foreign exchange bureaus). In general, we suggest that you limit the amount of money you convert into local currencies and exchange only what you think you will spend before leaving any foreign country. It is suggested that you save all receipts from your currency exchange transactions. Be aware that only paper currency will normally be accepted for exchange, and bills must be crisp, clean, and new.

**Cash:** The Philippines is primarily a cash economy, so we recommend bringing the funds you will need for personal spending in cash or withdrawing cash out of ATMs in country. If you bring USD, your bills should be:

- **New** (printed in the last 5 years)
- **In pristine condition** (no rips, tears, smudges, markings, creases, etc)
- **Larger denominations** (the \$50 and \$100 bills attract the best exchange rate).

Forex bureaus, banks, and ATMs are available in most major cities, and your guide can generally help with currency exchange throughout your trip. Note that travelers checks are no longer commonly used.

**Change:** Ask for smaller bills when you change money, or use your large bills at large shops to receive more change. In many cases, people (local vendors especially) don't have change.

**Credit Cards:** Credit cards (Visa preferred) are acceptable in larger establishments, while cash is more appropriate everywhere else. Most merchants will charge an additional 3-5% of the bill for a credit card transaction.

**ATM/Debit Cards:** You can use your debit card to withdraw money from ATMs. **\*Note: ATMs in developing regions of the world are often finicky, and may not work on a given hour or day. We recommend traveling with 2 or 3 crisp \$100 bills stored safely in your carry-on luggage to be exchanged in the case that ATMs are not working for you.\***

## IN-COUNTRY INFO

### Time

The Philippines is GMT +8. Therefore, the time in Manila is 12 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. When it is 9:00 AM in New York, it is 9:00 PM in Manila. When it is 9:00 AM in Los Angeles, it is 12:00 AM the following day in Manila.

#### *Smart Traveler Tip!*

Consider downloading a conversion app for things like currency, temperature, time, and distance while traveling. Here are some apps that we like: Units - Free Unit Converter, Convert Units for Free, Converter+, GlobeConvert

### Electricity

The Philippines uses a standard of 220V, 60Hz, and plug Type A, B, and C.

You may need to bring a transformer or elevator to reduce voltage while in the Philippines. It's possible that some of your devices may be fine with different voltages, but others might not be. Check the fine print on your electronics to find out which ones you need to watch out for—otherwise, changes in voltages can ruin your devices.

The following images show the type of plugs, sockets, and adapters you can use while traveling in the Philippines. To keep your appliances up and running, we suggest purchasing a universal plug.



## Water

It is strongly recommended not to drink tap water on this trip. Bottled water is cheap and easy to find. Some people also choose to brush their teeth with clean drinking water but this is up to personal preference based on how hardy you feel your stomach is. Do not use ice, unless you know it was made from clean drinking water. Bottled water and soft drinks will be supplied at all meals.

Similarly, we recommend that travelers eat foods that have been cooked well. Fresh vegetables and fruits bear the risk of having been washed in contaminated water. Fruits you can peel are usually safe (i.e. bananas).

## Toilet Paper

We recommend carrying toilet paper or tissues with you as some bathrooms, especially in more remote areas or restaurants, may not have any. Please also remember that in The Philippines you are required to throw the toilet paper into the bin provided and **not into the toilet** itself, as this can cause problems with the delicate sewage system.

## Waste Disposal

Keep in mind that much of the developing world waste disposal systems are not as advanced as you might be used to. Oftentimes, landfills are adjacent to conservation land or trash is burned. Recycling is often unavailable. To minimize your impact on the country you are visiting, please consider the following guidelines:

- Leave no Trace — everything that you bring with you should go home with you.
- If you plan on shopping, make sure that you have extra room in your luggage or an extra bag to check on your way home (don't dump items to make room!)
- Avoid packing with plastic baggies and instead purchase reusable packing cubes, cloth bags, and reusable toiletry bags
- Bring a reusable water bottle that you can refill
- Remove packaging or tags of any newly purchased items before you go

## Local Cuisine & Drink

Filipino cuisine is incredibly regional and diverse. Favor profiles are typically a mix of sweet, sour, and salty with plenty of vegetables and seafood incorporated. Some favorite local dishes include:

- Buko Pie — A sweet treat sold nearly everywhere, this pie has a crumbly crust with a creamy sweetened condensed milk filling. Some regions add coconut to the pie for extra sweetness.
- Kinilaw — Filipino ceviche, a mix of raw fish, onions, garlic, ginger, tomato, chili, and citrus.
- Kare-Kare — Similar to an ox tail stew with a rich peanut sauce
- Lomi — Egg noodle stir fry, can be made with various ingredients
- Sinigang — Similar to other asian sour soups, this dish has a tamarind base and comes in vegetarian and non-vegetarian options
- Adobo — meat stir-fry, a staple in filipino cuisine

## Weather Conditions

The Philippines has five types of climates: tropical rainforest, tropical monsoon, tropical savanna, humid subtropical and oceanic (both are in higher-altitude areas) characterized by relatively high temperature, oppressive humidity and plenty of rainfall. There are two seasons in the country, the wet season and the dry season. However, climatic conditions of the Philippines can vary from island to island in accordance with their geographical features. In major cities like Manila and Cebu, the temperatures tend to be warm all year, whereas mountainous Northern Luzon tends to be much cooler.

### Dry Season

- **November through February:** This time of year tends to be the most popular time of year to travel to the Philippines - with daily lows falling in the mid to low 70s (°F) and daily highs falling in the mid 80s to low 90s (°F). This time of year tends to feel cooler, comparatively, due to the frequent cloud coverage.
- **March through May:** The difference between the half of the dry season from the last is that instead of being cool and dry, these 3 months tend to be an average of 10 - 15 °F hotter throughout the day.

### Rainy Season

- **June through October:** The rainy seasons tends to be the least desirable time to travel to the Philippines, as it rains on and off regularly, but is also very humid. Temperatures tend to fall in the 80s (°F), with the evenings and mornings averaging in the low 80s and the height of the sun averaging in the high 80s and low 90s.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Experiencing different cultures is one of the joys of traveling. Please take note of the information below to better understand and respect these cultural differences in The Philippines.

**Greetings:** When meeting someone new, it is generally best to shake hands. Filipinos that already know each other will often touch cheeks or “beso” (from the Spanish term for kiss). The beso is a single cheek-to-cheek kiss, although some would do “beso-beso” or offer both cheeks in more familiar and affectionate relationships.

**Signs of Respect:** If an elderly person holds out their hand in front of their body with the palm facing down, this may be a sign that they are expecting a "mano" greeting. Take their hand, lean down, and touch it to your forehead. This greeting is about you respecting your elders but it is also about the elder blessing you when they touch your forehead.

**Pace of life:** The pace of Filipino life is slower than most Westerners are accustomed to. This requires some getting used to, and a willingness to adapt to a different lifestyle.

**Religion:** The Philippines is the only majority Christian nation in Asia. More than 86% of the population is Roman Catholic, 8% belongs to other Christian sects. There is also a small Muslim population, concentrated on the southern islands of Mindanao, Sulu, and Palawan. Scattered in isolated mountainous regions, ancient, indigenous beliefs are still practiced.

**Begging:** As in many developing countries, begging is common in the Philippines. We advise strongly against giving money to children, since it just perpetuates the cycle: if kids receive money, they may be forced to continue to beg rather than go to school. Some beggar children work for thieves or in situations where the money never benefits them directly. See our Responsible Travel Tips section below for more information.

**Bargaining:** Gentle bargaining is generally acceptable in the Philippines. Vendors sometimes will open with a high price they don't actually expect you to pay. Counter their offer with a lower number, and reach an agreement somewhere in between. You can usually negotiate the price down by about 15% to 25%. Throughout your interaction, keep a light-hearted attitude. Remember that this should be fun! It can be a great way to connect with locals.

### *Smart Traveler Tip!*

Family style meals are very common in the Philippines. When eating in a group, especially with locals, it's often considered polite to offer food to everyone at the table first, before serving yourself the first helping.

## **Language**

The official language of the Philippines are Filipino (Tagalog) and English. Common greetings are "Kamusta" (hello) and "Magandang araw" (beautiful day). To say "thank you", say "Salamat po" to show great respect, or just "Salamat".

## **Photography**

The Philippines is a beautiful country, and you will want to take lots of pictures. When photographing people, always ask permission first - this is a sign of respect. You can do this with gestures or ask your guide to translate. The only exception to this is when you are photographing a public scene with a lot of people in it, aiming at no one in particular. Because so many local people are asked for permission to be photographed, many will expect a tip or an outright fee for this. (In fact, some "professional posers" make a living this way.) Always be considerate of anyone's desire not to be photographed. There are some places where photography is prohibited, and these areas are usually marked. If you are uncertain about whether or not photography is permitted, your guide will be there to advise you.

## **Human Trafficking in Travel**

Elevate Destinations has signed *the Code of conduct for the protection of children from sexual exploitation in travel and tourism* and expects all of its partners to refuse involvement, both direct and indirect, in the

commercial sexual exploitation of children. A “child” is defined as a person younger than 18 years of age, according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

We encourage our travelers and suppliers to report the sexual exploitation of children. Information, even the smallest amount, can represent the missing piece of an ongoing investigation by law enforcement. If you are uncomfortable with leaving your name and contact information, you can report anonymously to law enforcement or NGOs. Report a concern [using this form](#); alternatively, you can email [protect@ecpat.net](mailto:protect@ecpat.net) to report sexual exploitation of children.

Read about Elevate’s values & vision, our [sustainability commitment](#), our programs that give back, and more on our website at [www.elevatedestinations.com](http://www.elevatedestinations.com). Our team members are always excited to share more on this topic. We acknowledge that to maintain truly sustainable travel products takes ongoing commitment. We continue to monitor our programs on the ground in order to improve them, and welcome your thoughts, feedback, and encouragement!

## Responsible Travel Tips

Elevate Destinations takes pride in its leadership in the field of responsible travel. We take care in selecting our local partners that share our environmental and social values and are avid supporters of locals working in the tourism industry as they are both the most impacted and impactful players at the local level. All of your ground costs on this trip are carbon offset using [Sustainable Travel International’s Carbon Calculator](#), and we encourage you to offset your international flights as well.

Here are a few tips that can help enrich your experience as a responsible traveler:

- **Keep an open mind:** Try to observe local customs and respect traditional cultures and people.
- **Language:** Learn a few basic greetings and “thank you” in the local language.
- **Local economy:** Support locally owned businesses, restaurants, and other services. Shop from local artisans to promote traditional crafts and encourage contemporary arts.
- **Pay a fair price:** Bargaining is acceptable on this trip and a great way to engage with locals. Try to have fun and not be overly aggressive in bargaining for souvenirs.
- **Respect:** It is important to acknowledge the privacy and dignity of others and ask before photographing or filming people. Ask permission before entering sacred places, homes or private land, and take heed of local customs (i.e. remove shoes, hats, cover hair with shawl, etc). Please ask your guide if you are unsure; they are there to support your introduction to the culture!
- **Community and environment:** Contribute to organizations that support traditional cultures and protect the natural environment. Keep to designated trails, and do not disturb plants and animals or their natural habitats.
- **Animal products:** Avoid purchasing crafts, clothing, furniture or other products that are derived from members of protected or endangered animal species.

- **Properly dispose of trash:** Avoid using plastic bags and try to minimize the use of other disposables. When traveling in areas away from cities, make sure to take out what you take in. Try using a reusable water bottle and treating your own drinking water when possible – check out what our friends at [Travelers Against Plastic](#) are doing!
- **Don't feel pressured to give away money or material items:** You will likely encounter instances of poverty and people asking for donations. We try to discourage giving away money or items as it can actually accentuate an unequal relationship between visitors and locals. Additionally, children that receive money, gifts, and sweets from you are encouraged to stick around for more, rather than to be in school. As difficult as it can be to turn down direct requests, sometimes giving your friendship and respect to locals can be the best gift of all. If you want to help, consider giving to a trustworthy charity, non-profit, or local school.

### *Smart Traveler Tip!*

In travel, especially in the developing world, things happen. Expect the unexpected! Keep an open mind, be flexible, and enjoy the moment. Sometimes the best memories come out of the unplanned.