



Things You Need to Know for travel to The PHILIPPINES

Discover Asia – Australia's most complete travel company to Asia

THE PHILIPPINES IS A THIRD WORLD COUNTRY. CONDITIONS ON PUBLIC TRANSPORT, TRAINS, AT AIRPORTS, THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRYSIDE AND IN MANY PARTS OF THE CITIES CAN BE EXTREMELY BASIC AND SOMETIMES DIRTY BY WESTERN STANDARDS. THE TRUE TRAVELLER SHOULD ACCEPT THESE CONDITIONS AS A SMALL PRICE TO PAY FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO VISIT A LARGELY "UNCOMMERCIALISED" COUNTRY, WHERE YOU WILL HAVE THE ALMOST UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF MEETING THE PEOPLE AT CLOSE QUARTERS AT ALL LEVELS OF SOCIETY, AND COMING AWAY WITH A REAL UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR WAY OF LIFE.

THE PHILIPPINES IS A TROPICAL COUNTRY, IT'S PEOPLE HAVE A LAID BACK AND RELAXED APPROACH TO LIFE AND ALL THINGS. PUNCTUALITY IS NOT A VIRTUE IN THE PHILIPPINES,...UNWIND, SLOW DOWN AND BE LESS DEMANDING AND ENJOY THE CASUAL AND FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE ALL AROUND YOU. YOU ARE ON HOLIDAY TO RELAX, THE ONLY TENSIONS YOU WILL FIND IN THE PHILIPPINES ARE THE ONES YOU BRING WITH YOU, DO EVERYONE A FAVOUR, ESPECIALLY YOURSELF AND LEAVE THEM BEHIND.

BE PREPARED FOR PEOPLE TO BE LATE FOR APPOINTMENTS, ACCEPT THAT 7PM START MAY MEAN 7.30PM. DON'T GET ANGRY WHEN YOUR FLIGHT IS RESCHEDULED TO ONE HOUR LATER, AND FINALLY LEAVES TWO HOURS LATER.

IF YOU HAVE AN OPEN MIND, RELISH THE IDEA OF GETTING CLOSE TO THE LOCALS, HAVE A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOUR AND VALUE HONESTY, SINCERITY AND OPEN-HEARTEDNESS..YOU WILL PROBABLY FALL DEEPLY IN LOVE WITH THE PHILIPPINES AND ITS PEOPLE, AS SO MANY OTHERS HAVE DONE BEFORE YOU.

NB: This booklet has had the same introduction since it was first written sixteen years ago, and, in 'public' areas, it remains greatly true today. But, what has happened recently is that we are able to house you in hotels of an excellent standard throughout your tour. Thus, during your daytime sightseeing, you can still witness the 'real The PHILIPPINES', but you will return every night to the comfort of your Standard, Superior or Deluxe hotel which is operated to the highest global standards.

IMPORTANT

Every effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this booklet. However, things change so fast in The PHILIPPINES, and in the way that we have to respond to these changing conditions, that inaccuracies in the information in this booklet may occur. For that reason, all statements are intended as a guideline only and no litigation may be based upon inaccuracies contained in this booklet. The contents of this booklet do not constitute part of, or in anyway amend, the booking conditions or brochurised tour inclusions of DISCOVER ASIA, or their agents around the world. Note that tour inclusions vary between tours and you should pay special attention to this fact. Thus, some of the information in this booklet may not be relevant to your tour package. If you are unsure, or your tour inclusions have not been explained to you, please contact DISCOVER ASIA, or their agent, for complete details.

Thank you for using DISCOVER ASIA in the planning of your tour to The PHILIPPINES. You will find plenty more information to assist in planning your tour on our website www.discoverasia.com.au

- For information about cities and sights in The PHILIPPINES – see 'Glossary of Cities'*
- For our Booking Conditions – see 'Booking Conditions' under The PHILIPPINES*
- For our Booking Form – see 'Booking Form' on our Home Page*
- For assistance in designing an Independent Tour – see 'Independent Tour Request'*

PRETOUR INFORMATION



ALTERATION TO ITINERARY:

Occasionally, tours cannot be operated exactly as per the published itinerary. This can be due to temporary airport closures, flight schedule changes or other operational requirements encountered by our ground handler. Such changes may be advised to us at extremely short notice, and often not at all. Whenever possible you will be advised of these changes prior to your departure. Sometimes our ground handler advises us of itinerary changes with the qualification that, the itinerary may have further changes at a later date, or, is expected to revert back to the original. In such rare circumstances, you may not be advised of these changes prior to your departure and your final itinerary may be advised to you upon arrival in The PHILIPPINES. It is the policy of our ground handler that no refunds will be made for alteration to or omissions in published itineraries. This may occasionally appear harsh or unfair, but it is a precondition of travel to The PHILIPPINES and booking with our ground handler. Please rest assured that, when itinerary changes are required, the utmost attention is paid by this company to ensure that they incur the least possible inconvenience to our passengers.



CASH/TRAVELLERS CHEQUES/CREDIT CARDS:

It is difficult to buy Philippine currency outside of the Philippines. There are restrictions as to how much of the currency you can carry out of the country. Therefore, you should exchange all your Philippine currency into either US\$ or AU\$ at the airport prior to departing at the end of your trip (save enough for the airport tax, or pay in US\$). An even more pleasant idea is to spend everything you have on wonderful Philippine souvenirs before you leave. The standard unit of Philippine currency is the PESO. For the current exchange rate check our website.

One of the first things that you should do upon entering Philippines is to convert your money into local currency. There are exchange desks upon leaving Immigration at all airports, or, you may avoid the queue, and wait until you reach your hotel (but, you may lose as much as 10% by using hotel exchange desks). Changing money/travelers cheques in banks, outside of Manila is not easy. In Boracay, there are several small banks, plus, the main Tourist Office in the centre of White Beach will change money 7 days a week (there is a small fee for doing this – about 1%). We recommend that you carry your travel funds in AU\$ travelers cheques. These are readily accepted in the Philippines. You should not need smaller cheques than AU\$50 denomination. AU\$50 should last you for 2-3 days, unless you intend to buy up big on souvenirs. Though the carrying of cash is beset with dangers and problems no matter where you travel in the world, it must be said that, US\$ cash is increasingly popular with both shop owners and government authorities throughout the Philippines. However, whilst you may use US\$ notes to get a better price when bargaining in open markets or private shops, unless you are used to haggling in a foreign currency, you could actually lose out on such transactions. VISA, DINERS CLUB, AMERICAN EXPRESS, MASTERCARD and other major universal credit cards are widely accepted for shopping in the Philippines.

ATM machines are common throughout the main tourist cities in The PHILIPPINES. You will receive funds from these machines in Filipino currency and your bank will debit you at the exchange rate current at the time of billing in Australia. Many ATMs in The PHILIPPINES have numbers only, so, if your password is a word, get used to what it translates to in numbers!



CLIMATE:

The Philippines is a vast country, spread over 7,107 islands and thus, while it may be raining in the north it could be sunny on the next island.

The country as a whole is "tropical", which means hot all year (averaging around 25-30 degrees C), and more humid in the "rainy season" June – September. Even when it does rain in the Philippines, it is usually only a downpour for an hour or two, and then the sun is out again. January is the coolest month, and May the hottest, Dec-Feb is cool & dry, Mar-May is hot & dry, July/Aug/Sep has some rain most days. Manila in May can reach 35-40 degrees C. Overall, temperatures and climatic conditions are surprisingly regular from one month to the next.

Whilst the typhoons and monsoons may affect the northern & eastern parts of Luzon from May to November, they are felt less (or not at all) in the southern islands of Boracay, Palawan, Cebu & Mindanao.



CLOTHING:

Apart from some up-market hotels in Manila, you will not need formal or "dressy" clothes at any time during your Philippines holiday. Jeans, slacks, shorts with a shirt/blouse or T-shirt are fine for the daytime. In the evening you may wish to get into something smart casual. Suits, ties, excessive jewellery, furs and the like are definitely out of place!

Boracay is SUPER casual, you will never need anything more than a T-shirt and shorts, plus, of course, a bathing costume. Never take anything more than casual clothes, probably the only time you will need long trousers or a dress is for the flight home! Flip flops or sandals are the best footwear, as you are constantly taking your shoes on and off.

Good sunglasses are essential for most beaches in the Philippines, as the sand is much whiter, and therefore brighter, than you will find in Australia. Similarly, as it is always around thirty degrees at any time of the year, thankfully a dry head, you should wear a sunhat or baseball cap most of the time.



COMMUNICATIONS:

Most hotels have IDD (International Direct Dialing) and can arrange very quickly to connect you by phone to anywhere in the world, normally from your own room. May hotels will also make their e-mail/fax available to guests. The cost for such services is similar to normal international rates. Reverse charge calls can be placed from most cities. Once you are in The PHILIPPINES it can be difficult for people to contact you. SEE EMERGENCY.



CUSTOMS REGULATIONS:

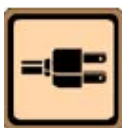
You are allowed to import into the Philippines 200 cigarettes, 50 cigars, or, two tins of tobacco, plus, two litres of alcohol, Importation of pornography is banned. The sentence for drug smuggling is death.

It is illegal to take any of the following away from the Philippines:- coral & sea shells (other than those sold in recognized souvenir stores); turtle shells and snake skins. (NB: the importation of these items is also banned into Australia).



EARLY MORNING CALLS:

Most hotels will provide a wake-up call through their switchboard. It is still advisable to carry a portable alarm, just to be on the safe side!



ELECTRICITY:

The standard throughout the Philippines is 220 volts/AC50 cycles. The standard plug is a three pin with a small round pin and two flat pins (commonly called the US type). Lots of hotels also have the same plug layout, but, the flat pins sit horizontal, not vertical! Many hotels use two pin plugs, either the small, round variety or two parallel flat pin type. We suggest that you take every kind of adaptor you can find, and, if you are caught off-guard, try to get an adaptor through the house-keeping department of your hotel.



EMERGENCY:

Whenever possible, we supply you with the phone/fax number of the hotels you are booked into and that of our local ground handler, if bookings have been made through them. In the event of emergency ONLY... should anybody need to contact you they are welcome to contact DISCOVER ASIA (02) 4963 7566. We shall then track you down (this should generally take only a couple of hours in a normal working day) and inform you to ring the person back.



ENTERTAINMENT:

With the exception of Boracay, the local bars and nightclubs are really designed for Philipinos and have little interest for average tourists. Most tourists find their entertainment in hotel & resort bars. If you travel much, you'll have noticed that nearly every hotel has a Philipino band! Thus, you can be sure of a very high standard of entertainment everywhere in the Philippines – in hotel bars, roaming serenaders in restaurants. Outside of the resorts, you may find that when you go into a bar a hostess will attach herself to your table, even if you are a couple! These girls drink special "girl's drinks" which will cost anything from 40-200 pesos (for a soft drink). They may seem very friendly and a conversation may be appealing, but, if you don't want an exorbitant bar bill at the end of the night, pleasantly, but, firmly, ask to be left alone. Always check the cost of your drinks before you order & ask if there are any "extras", such as entertainment charge or entry fee. Except for Boracay, most resorts are set by themselves, and far from other resorts or towns, this means that your entertainment will be restricted to your resort. In *Boracay*, a nice place to watch the sunset during Happy Hour is *Charl's Bar* midway on the beach. One place that is guaranteed to swing long into the night is *Moondogs*, with its' infamous Shooters bar. Here there is a constant challenge to down 15 shooters (short spirits) in a set period of time. The prize, if you are still standing...is a T-shirt. It is cheaper and healthier just to buy the T-shirt!! One of the most popular bars at night is *Beachcombers* accessed from either the beach or Main Road. It is only 20 metres from Moondogs.



HEALTH:

Should you be taken ill in the Philippines, you can expect a reasonably good standard of medical treatment. If you are taken seriously ill anywhere, then rapid repatriation can be readily arranged. Ensure that your insurance covers this eventuality. Tampons are hard to find anywhere in the Philippines. Take more than adequate supplies with you. Though the main supermarket in Boracay does generally stock them. Take calamine lotion in case you should be unlucky enough to get stung when swimming. We recommend that you carry your own "survival kit" of such items as – Band-aids, headache tablets, digestive remedies, eyedrops, nasal sprays, decongestants, charcoal tablets (indigestion), calamine lotion, cotton wool, medicated ointment, insect repellent & sun screen.

Naturally, you should carry any prescription drugs that you are taking already. It is generally a good idea to have a duplicate supply of all essential drugs and to carry these separate to your main supply and on your person, just in case your bags get lost or damaged. Medical insurance is essential to cover you for the entire period of your tour. Check with our local agent to ensure that your selected policy is suitable. A "bluebottle" type of jellyfish can get close to shore on some beaches at certain times of the year. The beaches at resorts will generally be sign-posted to alert you to this. They are not a major problem, nor are they a regular feature. We only mention this so that you are aware. Use calamine lotion if stung.

Tap water in Manila is mostly OK for drinking, if it is not, the tap will be marked "Not Potable". Even so, most hotels provide Mineral Water in the rooms. The local variety is generally free – Evian, Perrier, is charged for. Outside of the hotels, do not drink any tap water. This does not infer that the water is dirty, just that the natural enzymes in the water are very different to those that your body is used to at home and may cause some temporary upset. In most of the resorts (outside of Manila), the tap water is from fresh streams and springs, this can upset some stomachs, so we recommend that you do not drink the tap water.

Good bottled water is available in local shops, hotels and restaurants (for as little as 50 cents a bottle).

The sun is much stronger in the Philippines than in the temperate zones of Australia, make sure you carry a good sun screen lotion, and wear a hat when necessary. Take a sunburn cream with you.



HOTEL ACCOMMODATION:

Philippino hotels are world standard. Naturally, you get what you pay for, but, we would not sell a hotel or resort unless we felt it offered value for money and acceptable standards for Western clients. Please feel free to discuss the choice of hotel/resort with our experienced consultants. Everyone in our Philippines department has travelled to the destination and can help you find the right accommodation to suit your taste and budget.



AIRPORT-HOTEL TRANSFER:

Transfers are included in most of our packages. In most cases, a private car transfer (with English-speaking guide and driver) is costly; if you want to reduce your tour cost, you might like to discuss with us the alternatives, such as taxi. Taxis are metered, the drivers speak English and they are safe – this makes them a cheap and sensible alternative, especially after you have been in the country for a while and are beginning to feel comfortable about the place.

In Manila, the transfer from the international to domestic terminals is provided free by shuttle bus, for all passengers connecting between Philippine Airlines flights.

BORACAY TRANSFERS: The transfer to Boracay Island entails you wading ashore through the balmy, warm waters which means that you should make sure you are not wearing long trousers, lace-up shoes and socks on the day you arrive, or, at least, having something to change into. Rainy season Jun-Aug, the banca transfer boats may not land on White Beach, but, on the East side of the island, and the transfer to your resort may be completed by the motor cycle trishaws which are the common form of taxi on the island.



LANGUAGE:

It is both rare and comforting to find an overseas destination where EVERYONE speaks English. Yet that is just another reason why the Philippines is such a Paradise for travelers. English is the second official language of the Philippines (the other is Tagalog, the native tongue). Everyone both speaks and understands English from local market stall-holders to cab drivers and porters. You will never be lost or

Discover Asia – Australia's most complete travel company to Asia

confused in the Philippines. Even so, do attempt to “simplify” your English when speaking to poorly educated people, deep discussions of politics or philosophy probably will confuse them. Keep it simple, and you will enjoy your conversations with the locals.



LAUNDRY:

Just about all hotels provide a laundry service. As always when travelling, easily washed, drip-dry clothes, that will dry out in your bathroom overnight, are a boon. Laundry is not always cheap in the hotels and may take 24 hrs.



LUGGAGE:

Your international baggage allowance is 20 kilos (44lbs) in Economy Class. Within the Philippines you are allowed to check in two bags per person. The domestic weight limit is 18 kilos, this limit is strictly applied. Internationally, you may carry on board only one ‘normal’ travel bag. Within the Philippines you can carry two bags on board. On the charter flight to El Nido, the check-in weight for luggage is 15 kilos (there is a baggage storage room at the airline office for El Nido).

Film is quite reasonably priced in the Philippines. Do not have your film developed in the Philippines, wait till you get home. Be sure to take additional flashcubes and batteries as they can be hard to find in remoter regions. As in all countries nowadays, all flights require you to pass your luggage through x-ray machines. They claim that they are ‘film-safe’. Most authorities claim that film below 1000 ASA can be passed 100 times through ‘film-safe’ x-ray machines without any damage. They never explain whether they mean damage to the machine or the film!



MEALS/DRINK:

The Philippines is famous for its’ food... fresh, cooked in healthy conditions and with cooking styles from all over the world. Fresh fruit is plentiful, of course, and, if you had to choose a typical cuisine for the Philippines, it would probably be Spanish style or Seafood.



SAFETY:

Because of the “bad ol’ days” of Manila, (in other words, when the Yankee GI’s roamed the town in packs), the town has a bad international image for safety, which it does not deserve. It is true that politicians and the local wealthy are still occasionally kidnapped by bandits and political extremists for ransom. But, crime against tourists is rarely heard of. And, when it is, it is normally due to incredible stupidity on behalf of the tourist, or, that they were in a bad area, with evil intent themselves, and fell victim to their own wicked ways. It is the experience of the writer that, in those areas where tourists are likely to stay and walk about, you are as safe in the Philippines as in Australia. The common rules of travel apply – don’t flash your money around in public places, especially bars...don’t talk or wander off with strangers who approach you offering special deals and services...don’t wander off from the brightly lit streets and main thoroughfares, don’t walk by yourself through parks or on beaches late at night...only use recognizable taxis with meters. In any city, be it Australia or overseas, if you decided to delve into the darker side of any city, you are taking a risk.



TAXES:

All hotel and Government taxes incurred in the booking of your tour are prepaid. You will be required to pay a departure (airport) tax for INTERNATIONAL flights – currently 500 pesos. Some domestic airports impose a tax – about 10-50 pesos. Most restaurants, hotels and bars impose two taxes 10% + 10%. This is a local tax, plus, a service charge (instead of a tip to the staff, though often the staff still like a tip!). The local tax is always levied, if the service charge is not levied, you are expected to tip.



TICKET RECONFIRMATION:

You must reconfirm each onward flight prior to departure from that city (preferably within 72 hours of the flight). If you are travelling independently, you may ask your hotel reception to reconfirm your flight for you (some airlines do not require re-confirmation of flights). Philippine Airlines operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Flights are normally full both on domestic and international sectors, so DO reconfirm. IMPORTANT: Flights are so frequently overbooked in the Philippines, that the airlines often use the “legitimate” excuse of non-reconfirmation to cancel people off flights. As soon as you arrive in any town, make the reconfirmation of your next flight a top priority. Philippine Airlines (PAL) used to be known as *P*lane *A*lways *L*ate! Flights are still frequently delayed, but, it is nowhere near as much a problem as it used to be.



TIME ZONES:

The Philippines is about two hours behind Australian Eastern Standard Time (three in summer).



TIPPING/GIFTS:

Tipping has now become an essential part of travelling anywhere in the world, though, the Philippines is not as bad as many overseas countries. Tipping is expected for porters (20-40 pesos depending on the standard of hotel), taxi drivers (add 10-15% to the fare, or, round the fare up to the next “ten”), waiters in restaurants (10%, if no service charge is made). It must be stressed that, as in all countries, a tip should ONLY be considered, IF YOU HAVE RECEIVED GOOD SERVICE. Occasionally, staff such as bellboys may expect a tip for any “additional” service (such as delivering room service or laundry).



TRANSPORT:

Unless otherwise requested at the time of booking, all passengers on tours will travel in Economy Class both internationally and domestically. You may upgrade to Business or First, at an additional expense, upon application to your local agent. For your assistance we may frequently show flights and timings in our brochures and itineraries. These are not guaranteed and may be altered without notification. Alternation to your itinerary, and to the standard of your accommodation can occur, though less frequently than in years past. These potential changes are totally beyond the control of overseas tour operators. Travel within the Philippines by air is either by jets (Boeing 727, 707, Trident etc.) or, to small towns, propeller aircraft (similar to the Focker Friendships which service rural towns in overseas countries). Philippine domestic air services are normally in very new aircraft and the seating is rarely cramped. Mechanically, the standards of these airlines are high. The general level of cabin service and cabin maintenance is also very good. Local sightseeing and transfers will be either in private cars

(Toyota or similar), or, 12 seater mini-busses which are of high quality and styled after the standard tourist coaches that you would find in any Western country. These cars and busses will normally have air-conditioning/heating. They are generally kept in very clean condition both inside and out. Drivers are, in the experience of the writer, careful and courteous. There are two types of taxi in Manila, metered and non-metered (or hotel service). It is very important to ensure that your taxi works off the meter, a non-metered taxi will fix a rate for the journey at the start of the trip. It will always be more than a metered journey would cost, often two to three times as much! Most taxis are air-conditioned and always kept clean. As always, cab drivers speak good English. The most popular form of transport for Philipinos, in both major towns and country, is the "Jeepney". Originally these were converted from the old Jeeps left behind after the

War, but, now they are purpose built. Every owner tries to outdo the next with his decoration of his jeepney. They are designed to hold about twenty people, but, everyone crams in so they actually hold an infinite

number of people. There is no such thing as a "full" jeepney. They are not really suitable for tourists, except real budge travelers, as they get *very* crowded & uncomfortable, especially on hot days. They are cheap, about 10 pesos for most city journeys. It is hard to work out their route and where they are going! On Boracay, you can hire a motor bike for 150 pesos/hour, a mountain bike for 50 pesos/hour. In an hour, you can get the whole way around the island. On many of the smaller islands, the taxi service is by motor bike and side car.



VISA:

Australians do not need visas for a stay of less than 21 days.



VACCINATIONS:

At the moment (and for the past several years) no vaccinations are compulsory for travel to The PHILIPPINES. The exception to this rule is if, 14 days prior to your arrival in The PHILIPPINES, you have visited an area where Cholera has broken out. However, most authorities recommend Typhoid for any international travel nowadays. These are only valid for 6 months at a time. A course of Malaria tablets may be necessary for travel on the Yangtze or in the more remote parts of Southern The PHILIPPINES in the hotter months. DISCOVER ASIA keeps in constant touch with the Travellers Medical & Vaccination Centre, if any additional health precautions are deemed necessary, be assured that we shall inform you prior to your tour departure. If you are susceptible to colds, a course of antibiotics may be a good idea. Similarly, flu shots are a good idea in the Winter months. See your doctor to obtain such prescriptions.