

The Philippines

Visas

Tourist visas are not required for U.S. citizens (along with several other countries) holding a passport valid for at least six months for stays up to 30 days. In this case, you must also provide proof of purchase of a return or outbound ticket upon your entry to the country.

Non-immigrant visas for longer stays are available through the Philippine Embassy in the United States (see <http://www.philippineembassy-usa.org/philippines-dc/consular-services-dc/faq-dc/#nonimmigrant> for details).

Climate

The Philippines is hot year-round, but sea breezes can provide some fresh relief during the dry season (November through February). The typhoon season lasts from July through October, although in recent years it has seemed to start and finish later. In addition to more precipitation, the typhoon season also means higher humidity. However, even during the wet season, it doesn't always rain torrentially, and days can be hot and sunny with short, intense downpours at dusk. January and February are the coolest months, while March, April, and May are very hot: expect sunshine all day and temperatures that peak around 98° F (36° C).

Rainfall patterns vary across the country. In Manila, Palawan, and Coron, for instance, most rain falls during the typhoon season. Other areas (including much of the Bicol region) have no distinct dry season, with the most rain falling from December to February. The Visayas has only a short dry season from November to January, while in Leyte and Bohol, rainfall levels don't change much throughout the year. It is recommended that you check the local climate before making plans.

Clothing

Lightweight cottons and linens are advisable throughout most of the year, with warmer clothes useful on cooler evenings. Rainwear or umbrellas are recommended for the rainy season. Flooding is common in many areas in Metro Manila and other cities. Rain boots are thus also recommended, especially if you have any open wounds on your feet or legs, since walking in flooded areas in cities carries the risk of serious infection from leptospirosis.

Budgeting

Accommodations and Food

Traveling in the Philippines can be very inexpensive. A bed in a dorm-style hostel can be as cheap as about \$8USD. Mid-range private air-conditioned rooms can run between \$20 and \$60, depending on location and season. Two- to four-star hotels in Manila range from \$35 to \$95 per night. More expensive options are certainly also available, with rooms in luxury hotels and boutique resorts running for over \$200 per night.

Food is also very affordable. Eating at street stalls and markets, you can get a meal for less than \$2. Most sit-down restaurants are also inexpensive, around \$3-\$6. The fancier (and more touristy) the restaurant, the more expensive. Filipino cuisine will also usually be a bit more affordable than western cuisine. A liter of water at a convenience store is about 80¢, while a beer or soda at a restaurant is about \$2.

Transportation

Because the Philippines is made up of over 7,000 islands, transportation can be expensive if you need to travel any great distance. Boats and planes are the ways to travel between islands. For the most part, ferries will be the cheaper option. Tickets range from about \$5.50 to \$40 for a one-way ride, depending on distance, the class of ticket, and the type of ferry/liner. 2GO Travel (travel.2go.com.ph) is the umbrella operator for many major ferry services. Tickets can be bought in advance, although for well-served routes it's usually possible to pay before boarding. Philippine Airlines (www.philippineairlines.com) is the main air carrier, though there are numerous others.

Philippine buses come in all shapes and sizes, and bus terminals also run the gamut from large garages with signs and ticket booths, to basic outdoor sheds with drivers clamoring for business. Bus fares will vary depending on distance; inter-city rides can be as inexpensive as less than \$1 for a 2-hour ride, to \$12 for an overnight ride. Philippine National Railway is the only train operator in the country. Its single operating line, Main Line South, runs infrequent services. The maximum train fare in an air-conditioned car is \$1.20.

In most towns and cities, public transportation comes in three forms: tricycles, pedicabs, and jeepneys. (Some recommend that foreigners avoid tricycles and pedicabs if you're not accompanied by a local, as safety may not be guaranteed.)

Tricycles are motorbikes with sidecars, and usually hold up to three people. They are useful for short distances, and fares might 10¢-\$1. Pedicabs look similar but are motorless and are pedaled by the operator. They normally don't travel more than two kilometers point-to-point, and fares are 20¢-60¢. Agree on a rate with the driver before your ride. Jeepneys were adapted from American Jeeps after WWII. The basic fare in Metro Manila is 16¢ for the first four kilometers, with 3¢ added for every kilometer

thereafter. Taxis are available in cities and many towns. Be sure meters are used as some taxi drivers will otherwise set an exorbitant and arbitrary rate. A short ride (3 miles) in Manila will cost about \$2. A longer ride (10 miles) will be closer to \$5.

Uber and GrabCar are more recent options that are safer and more reliable. Prices are also reasonable, as you can expect to pay only \$1-2 more for these services than for a taxi. Just as in the U.S., these fares a bit higher during periods of heavy demand.

Manila also has the Metro Rail Transit and Light Railway Transit. A trip for the length of one line is about 50¢ one way, but expect crowds. As in any crowded area anywhere in the world, there is the potential for pick pocketing and bag snatching when taking public transportation. Be aware of your belongings at all times, especially if you want to sleep on overnight transport.

Tipping

Tipping is not expected in many cases, but it is generally very much appreciated. Taxi drivers do expect tips, though tips are not necessary for Uber and Grab Car drivers. Twenty to fifty pesos (40¢-\$1) for a taxi ride is sufficient. Take care, however, as taxi drivers are also notorious for taking advantage of customers in terms of tipping and fares. Pay close attention as payment and change is counted.

Currency

The basic unit of the Philippine currency is the peso (₱, PHP, P\$). Notes are assigned colors by denominations: ₱20 (orange), 50 (red), 100 (purple), 200 (green), 500 (yellow), and 1,000 (blue). Coins are usually in denominations of ₱1 (silver color), 5 (light gold color, hole in the middle), and 10 (silver outer border, gold middle). The exchange rate is around ₱50 to \$1USD.

U.S. dollars are sometimes accepted as an alternative form of payment in touristy areas and can work as emergency cash. Don't expect it to be accepted in most areas, though, and be prepared to obtain Philippine pesos.

Foreign ATM cards can be used in Philippines bank ATMS that carry the VISA electron, MasterCard, PLUS, or BancNet logos (BDO, BPI, etc.). An additional surcharge of ₱200 is levied per transaction. ATMs are plentiful in major cities in malls and banks. Some local banks will have a withdrawal limit (₱4,000-20,000 per withdrawal), and may also limit to two withdrawals per day. Some ATMs may run out of money on weekends, paydays (10th/15th and 25th/30th of the month, and just before and during national holidays.

Money changers in cities offer better rates than those at the airport and hotels. Larger American bills (\$100) will also get a better rate than smaller ones (\$20), and take note that some changers do not accept bills that are old and have tears. Reliable money

changers in Manila are Edzen, Czarina, or Sanry's. Different money changers have different exchange rates; Czarina and Sanry's usually have better rates than Edzen for exchanging USD\$ to pesos. When making any currency exchange, always make sure to count your changed money yourself before you put it in your wallet.

A new problem is skimming or copying ATM and credit cards. This is unlikely to happen in malls or other places where your card is presented at the point of sale and thus never out of your sight. It is more likely in restaurants where you hand your card over and it's taken out of sight for the transaction. To defeat skimmers, just pay in cash if you cannot watch the transaction. You can also ask your bank not to pay any transactions not needing a signature.

The card slot on modern ATM machines is almost flush with the machine. If the mouth for the entry for your card is not flush with the machine, it is possible it has a card skimmer attached. Other clues for the presence of a card skimmer are unnecessary mirrors and/or brochure holders. These may have cameras attached to pick up your PIN. If you see any of these, do not insert your card.

Telecommunications

Smartphones

If you want to use a smartphone while in the Philippines, you can choose between bringing a locked phone with you, bringing an unlocked phone, or buying a relatively cheap one after you arrive. If you bring a locked phone, make sure you understand your mobile company's terms for international roaming. With an unlocked phone or one you buy in the Philippines, you can simply purchase a SIM card and have a local number.

SIM cards are easy to purchase at local convenience stores like 7-Eleven, Ministop, and cell phone kiosks. They are cheap (less than ₱50). Prepaid SIM cards are widely available in all malls and shopping centers. These come preloaded with a set amount of minutes, usually with free calls to cellphones on the service provider. The commonly used cell phone companies are Globe and Smart. A third company, Sun, has good coverage in some areas.

A local company, MyPhone, sells durable, dual-SIM card, basic smartphones for as low as ₱800. This is a good option to avoid worrying about the safety of your iPhone when navigating city crowds or bumpy travel conditions.

Top ups (called LOAD) are available at every street corner and *sari-sari shop* (convenience store). LOADS are available for as low as ₱10 and high as ₱300, valid for little as one day and up to six months.

When calling a cellphone number from within the Philippines, you must usually use the prefix "0."

"00" is the International Direct Dial code to call overseas from within the Philippines.

"63" is the International Country Code for calling the Philippines.

Wi-Fi

Another way to use your smartphone or access the Internet via a laptop is by renting pocket Wi-Fi from the airport. Pocket Wi-Fi allows you to access the Internet anywhere, but making local calls will still cost as much as international ones unless you use FaceTime or Viber. Rental rates are fairly expensive at about ₱350-760 (\$7-\$15) per day. You also must return the pocket Wi-Fi to the airport in good condition.

You can also connect to Smart or Globe networks by buying a prepaid USB dongle for around ₱3,000 (\$60).

Internet access is theoretically available in much of the Philippines, however it is frequently not working, inconsistent, or very slow. In Internet cafés, plan to pay about ₱25 per hour for Internet access in urban areas and ₱50 in very remote areas. Fewer and fewer hostels and hotels have computers for guests to use, but Wi-Fi is becoming more available in hotels, cafés, and some restaurants. However, it's best not to count on such public Wi-Fi functioning well.

Electricity

Electrical outlets in the Philippines are 220 Volts (the United States' are 120 Volts), and the frequency is 60 Hz (the United States' is also 60 Hz). Vietnamese electrical sockets are Types A / B / C (the US uses A and B; 2- and 3-pronged, respectively). You will need a power plug adapter in case you need to use a Type C electrical socket. Check the voltage limitations of your appliances and electronics for whether you will need a voltage converter.

Vaccinations and Medical Care

Always consult a doctor or travel clinic before traveling to the Philippines – do so about eight weeks before your trip. U-M affiliates can visit the University Health Service's travel website (<https://www.uhs.umich.edu/travelhealth>) for more information, travel precautions, and contact information to make an appointment. They will advise you about appropriate vaccinations and disease prevention precautions you should take. Different vaccinations are recommended depending on your travel plans. Vaccinations for Hepatitis A, B, and Typhoid are recommended for most travelers to the Philippines.

If you take regular medication, you should make sure to have enough for your entire stay. Some prescription drugs may be illegal in the Philippines. Call their embassy (see

below) to verify that all your prescriptions are legal to bring with you. Ask your doctor to help you get prescriptions filled early if you need to. Filipino laws regarding the possession or use of drugs are particularly stringent. Possession of any quantity of narcotics, including “soft” drugs, may result in expulsion, arrest, or imprisonment. To avoid any incident, pack any medications in their original containers, and be sure that their labels are easy to read. Bring a signed and dated letter from your physician confirming your current medication needs, especially if you have reason to carry any syringes or needles.

Malaria is a risk in some parts of the Philippines. If you are going to a risk area, or if you are spending a lot of time outdoors or sleeping outside, fill your malaria prescription before you leave, and take enough with you for the entire length of your trip. Follow your doctor’s instructions for taking the medication; some need to be started before you leave.

Dengue fever is another mosquito-borne illness that is common in the Philippines. There is no preventative vaccine for dengue approved in the United States, so follow bite prevention measures day and night. These include using effective repellants, wearing long-sleeved tops and long trousers, screening windows, using air conditioning if available, and sleeping under mosquito nets. The incubation period for dengue is 4-10 days, and symptoms include sudden onset of high fevers (which can last from 3-7 days), severe headaches, muscle and joint pain, eye pain, and patchy red skin rashes. Nausea, vomiting, and bleeding can also occur. These symptoms mimic malaria, so if you have them, you should also be tested for malaria. Cases of dengue fever usually improve within a few days. Since dengue is a virus, antibiotics are not effective, but you should be hospitalized so doctors can monitor your condition appropriately. Be sure to rest and drink plenty of fluids. Talk to your doctor about further ways you can prevent malaria and dengue fever while traveling.

Before you leave, ask your doctor about prescription-strength medication to treat traveler’s diarrhea, and how you should plan to rehydrate if/when you experience symptoms. Be sure to carry prescription medications in their original marked bottles with a copy of the prescription in case of questioning at customs.

Bugs (like mosquitos, ticks, and fleas) can spread a number of diseases in the Philippines. You can reduce your risk by taking steps to prevent bug bites. You should use DEET insect repellent, especially outside of major cities. Stay and sleep in air-conditioned or screened rooms, and use a bed net if the area where you are sleeping is exposed to the outdoors.

Tap and well water is not potable, and it is highly recommended for visitors to consume only boiled or bottled water for drinking and when brushing their teeth.

Avoid or exercise great caution when eating street food. It is advisable to avoid eating food served at room temperature, raw or soft-cooked (runny) eggs, raw or undercooked (rare) meat or fish, unwashed or unpeeled raw fruits and vegetables, unpasteurized dairy products, and "bushmeat" (monkeys, bats, or other wild game).

Plan for how you will get health care during your trip should the need arise. For instance:

- Carry a list of local doctors and hospitals at your destination.
- Review your health insurance plan to determine what medical services it would cover during your trip. Consider purchasing travel health and medical evacuation insurance.
- Carry a card that identifies, in the local language, your blood type, chronic conditions or serious allergies, and the generic names of any medications you take.

Safety and Security

You should review the U.S. State Department's latest Travel Warning when traveling to the Philippines and consider the safety and security risks while there. As of July 2017, the State Department warned against all non-essential travel to the Sulu Archipelago and through the southern Sulu Sea, and to exercise extreme caution when traveling to the island of Mindanao, due to continued terrorist threats, insurgent activities, and kidnappings (see <https://travel.state.gov/content/passports/en/country/philippines.html> for further information).

If you can, travel with a trusted local or someone familiar with the areas you will visit. Non-Filipino foreigners and those who appear unsure of their plans and circumstances are easy targets for kidnapping or other ill-treatment. Choose official taxis or public transportation such as trains and buses. Ride only in cars that have seatbelts, and do not enter a taxi if it has already accepted another passenger. Arrange payment before departing. Avoid overcrowded or unsafe transport. Vehicle traffic is dense and unpredictable, so consider the risks of driving your own vehicle if you are not used to the Philippine road conditions.

Con games, pick pocketing, Internet scams, and credit/ATM card fraud are common in the Philippines. Be wary of unknown individuals who attempt to befriend you, especially just after you arrive in the country. Do not accept food, drink, or rides in private vehicles from strangers. One common form of credit/ATM card fraud involves an illicit electronic device attached to ATM card readers that retrieves and records information, including the PIN, from a card's magnetic strip. The information is then used to make unauthorized purchases. To limit your vulnerability to this scam:

- Never let your card out of your sight.

- Avoid ATMs with unusual coverings attached to the card receiver or in locations in dimly lit areas.
- Prevent observation by others when entering your PIN code.

Report crimes to the local police at the 911 hotline, and contact the U.S. Embassy at +(63) (2) 301-2000.

Be aware that you are subject to local laws when in the Philippines. Be particularly aware that penalties for possessing, using, or trafficking illegal drugs in the Philippines are extremely severe. Convicted offenders can expect long jail sentences and heavy fines. If a traveler is found to have any amount of illegal drugs on their person, or nearby, when arriving at or departing from the Philippines, they will be charged with trafficking. Trafficking is non-bailable, and the maximum penalty is life imprisonment. If you intend to enter the Philippines with a prescribed controlled substance (e.g., medical marijuana), obtain clearance from the Philippine government first. Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs could land you immediately in jail.

You should carry a copy of your passport at all times in the event that you are asked about your citizenship. You may be questioned by authorities if you take pictures of certain buildings, especially government buildings or military installations.

The Bureau of Immigration may consider the participation of foreigners in demonstrations or political rallies in the Philippines to be a violation of the terms of admission. Foreign nationals who participate in demonstrations or political rallies may be detained and deported for violating Philippine immigration laws.

Women Travelers

Women traveling in the Philippines rarely experience unique problems. Foreign women may experience stares and occasional cat calls or lewd comments in the local language(s) in the provinces. The best response in these situations is to show little reaction. Drawing embarrassing attention to the offender will possibly lead to resentment and the possibility that they will retaliate.

Modesty is essential to the behavior of young Filipinas, especially in the provinces. Shorts and T-shirts are fine for women anywhere, but bikinis are only for the beach. Even there, it's considered bad form to wander through a restaurant or souvenir shop without covering up first.

LGBTQIA Travelers

There are no laws criminalizing sexual orientation, consensual same-sex sexual conduct in private between adults, or the organization of LGBTQIA events in the Philippines. Homosexual conduct or affection that occurs in public may be subject to the "grave

scandal” prohibition in Article 200 of the Revised Penal Code. Avoid such public displays of affection.

There is no prohibition on entry into the Philippines by LGBTQIA individuals. Transgender travelers should be aware that immigration officials may require supporting documents if the gender in the traveler’s passport does not reflect the gender expressions of a transgender person. According to Philippine law, an individual’s sex must match that assigned at birth as reflected on the official birth certificate, even in cases of post-operative sex reassignment. No federal law prohibits discrimination against LGBTQIA individuals, but several cities have passed local ordinances protecting LGBTQIA rights.

Accessibility

While in the Philippines, individuals with disabilities may find accessibility and accommodation very different from in the United States. Currently, most public places and public transportation are not accessible to persons with physical disabilities. Persons with certain disabilities will face difficulties in the Philippines because foot paths, rest rooms, road crossings, and tourist areas are often not equipped to assist them.

Language

There are two official languages in the Philippines (Filipino/Tagalog and English), as well as 19 recognized regional languages. Most Filipinos will have a basic understanding of English and try to converse with you if they can. Most people are friendly enough to make conversation, but some may be too shy to carry on a full conversation in English. As when traveling in any foreign country, using even a little bit of the local language(s) can go a long way to getting a friendly reception wherever you go.

Cultural Differences and Adapting to the Philippines

For many Euro-American travelers to the Philippines, the country may seem much more culturally accessible than other countries in Asia. English is spoken almost everywhere, people wear Western clothes and visit malls, and the main religion is Catholicism. Average Filipinos tend to be quite approachable and friendly, and so in many ways, American travelers will not face significant troubles when trying to assimilate into Filipino ways and values. However, there are some complex cultural rules that govern behavior among Filipinos, and failure to be sensitive to them can lead to embarrassment and frustration.

Here some of the most important items to be aware of:

- One of the major controlling elements in Filipino society is *hiya*, or a sense of shame/modesty/humility. *Hiya* is a factor in almost all social situations. For instance, a sense of *hiya* may prevent someone from asking a question for fear it makes them look foolish. *Hiya* means that many Filipinos refuse to disagree openly for fear they may cause offense. Another related value is *pakikisama* or "to get along." This means it's best not to draw undue attention to yourself, or confront service employees or others who make mistakes. If mistakes need to be discussed, do so quietly and patiently to avoid embarrassment.
- *Pakikisama* also motivates many Filipinos to not refuse invitations for social gatherings, to participate in social events, and to engage in certain conversations as appropriate to get along well with others. Take note that behaving in ways contrary to this social ideal may cause offense or misunderstanding.
- To avoid frustration, keep in mind that, in their desire to get along, many Filipinos find it difficult to say no. So, they say yes instead. A casual yes is never taken as binding. There are also a range of ways people might avoid saying "no" outright, such as "maybe," "whatever," or "if you say so."
- Filipinos are generally outgoing people who don't consider it rude to ask personal questions. Filipinos will want to know where you are from, why you are in the Philippines, how old you are, whether you are married, if not why not, and so on and so forth. They pride themselves on their hospitality and are always ready to share a meal or a few drinks. They might be offended if you refuse outright.
- For social events, punctuality is not expected. In fact, it is considered impolite to be on time for a party. The speed of service in restaurants has increased in recent years, but prepare to have your patience occasionally tested.

Other Useful Information

Embassies/Consulates

U.S. citizens can be served at:

U.S. Embassy Manila

1201 Roxas Boulevard

Manila, Philippines 1000

Telephone: +(63) (2) 301-2000

Emergency After-Hours Telephone: +(63) (2) 301-2000 x0

acsinfomanila@state.gov

<https://ph.usembassy.gov/embassy/manila/>

U.S. Consular Agency – Cebu City

Ground Level, Waterfront Hotel

Salinas Drive

Lahug, Cebu City

Philippines 6000

Telephone: +(63) (32) 231-1261

acsinfocebu@state.gov

Public holidays (2017)

January 1st – (International) New Year's Day

April 9th – Araw ng Kagitingan

April 13th – Maundy Thursday

April 14th – Good Friday

May 1st – Labor Day

June 12th – Independence Day

TBA – Eid'l Fitr

August 28th – National Heroes Day

TBA – Eidul Adha

November 30th – Bonifacio Day

December 25th – Christmas Day

December 30th – Rizal Day

Philippines Time Zone

The time zone for the Philippines is UTC/GMT +8 hours. The Philippines has no daylight saving – the time zone remains the same throughout the year.